Kaze no Stigma

Volume 6: The Hurricane Pike

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Chapter 1: Disaster Together With The Wind

Part 1

Completely burning and exorcising the evil spirit in a single stroke, Kannagi Ayano turned around. - And then her eyebrows frowned at an acute angle.

What was reflected in her field of vision was the silhouette of a man looking at the sky with a somewhat distant look.

In short, despite accompanying her here under the pretext of being her bodyguard, he seemed not to have noticed that the battle ended.

"—Hey."

"Huh? Aah, is it over?"

Glaring at him with half opened eyes, the man - Yagami Kazuma briefly looked over the surroundings and nodded once. And then, he declared without hesitation,

"Let's go back then."

"…You're so…" groaned Ayano in a gloomy tone.

But, of course, Kazuma ignored that and started walking by himself.

"Aa, hey, wait!"

Chasing after him in a fluster, Ayano drew near Kazuma with a pout.

"I already forgot how many times I told you this but - since it's been arranged, you're kind of my escort. Even if you won't help at least look!"

"Ha ha ha, you're so baka."

Expressing a refreshing smile, the kind a good young man would have, Kazuma looked over his shoulder at Ayano.

"It's because I really trust your abilities that I can leave it to you without worries."

"I can't believe you at all!" replied Ayano as if slapping something.

How to say this, it was an entirely normal back and forth argument.

Yes, since then - since Pandemonium was destroyed and Bernhardt and Lapis disappeared, Kazuma didn't display any sort of change.

With the same frivolous, slack smiling face like always, teasing Ayano as always, wondering about like

always, with an attitude that couldn't be grasped just like the wind, he spent his days like that.

There was no indication he was forcing himself. There was no change from before — Even though, that was impossible.

He must be hurt. He must be sad.

And yet, Kazuma never showed that.

Ayano was very uneasy about it.

She thought it was dangerous for Kazuma not to show others his weakness.

But, what she feared even more was the possibility that she didn't understand anything about Kazuma.

In spite of the fact that he was hurt, he did not seem to be so.

If that's the case, assuming Kazuma would get hurt even more in the future, would she not even be able to see that?

No, everything she saw of Kazuma until now was maybe nothing but a mask that concealed his wounded heart.

She was supposed to have come to understand Kazuma, even just a little.

She was supposed to get to the core, even just a little, to the inner part of his heart that was pretending to be superficial.

But, if all of it was nothing more but a delusion…

"Kazuma—"

Walking absent-mindedly, Ayano stared at Kazuma's back as he walked soundlessly.

If she were to call him, he would turn around with the same smiling face. But -

"Are you here? Are you really looking at me?"

He is so close and yet, for some reason, Kazuma's back looked so distant.

Was it because she was thinking such things? Not typical of her, her reaction was late.

Suddenly, something like a huge pole appeared before her eyes and without time to avoid it, Ayano crashed into it.

"Kyaa!?"

It had a somewhat soft touch for a pole. Looking at it more clearly, it was Kazuma's arm pushed out in front of her eyes.

"Wha, Kazuma—"

Her words of complaint were interrupted in the middle.

Kazuma's face didn't have a particle of jest to it and was sharply looking forward like a totally different person from before.

"Kazuma, what is—"

"Prepare."

Without giving her the time to finish her question, he directly ordered.

Almost by reflex, Ayano hunched her back.

Immediately following - from the front, a spiritual power detonated.

The wind barrier Kazuma put on creaked fighting with the same kind of power.

"Same nature—huh, eeeeeeeeh!?"

Ayano's face became stiff with shock.

But no matter how much she doubted her eyes, the reality didn't change.

What was attacking them right now was beyond doubt, the power of *wind*.

"Why on earth…" murmured Kazuma, as if spitting out while enduring the *enemy* attack.

The disturbance felt in that voice was definitely not Ayano's delusion.

For Kazuma, the one who contracted the Spirit Lord of the Wind - the <<Contractor>>, it means that all of the wind spirits are extensions of himself.

To have them turn on him, was theoretically impossible.

"…"

Ayano unsheathed Enraiha, and searched for presence in the surroundings. As for the perception within range, she did not feel any hostile being. But -

"Kazuma, where is the enemy?"

At that question asked in a controlled voice, Kazuma pointed straight ahead. Without waiting, from there regular footsteps resounded - and then, stopped.

"—Eeh?"

Looking at the figure that boldly appeared from the front without hiding himself, Ayano unintentionally opened her eyes wide.

She looked at Kazuma as if asking if that was the right person.

But, without turning his eyes to Ayano, Kazuma was only staring directly at the boy in the front.

That's right - the *enemy* blocking their way was even younger than Ayano, a boy of thirteen or fourteen.

His body, dressed in a stand-up collar shirt and thin pants, looked more delicate that his years and he was shorter than Ayano.

He had soft hair, cut short, that made one want to touch.

He was a very androgynous but adorable bishonen.

But, the impression until now was overturned by only two things.

The first were those eyes. The color was dark brown, very common for Asian people. But the light that dwelt in them, like the difference between a cat and a tiger cub, made it clear that the boy was a warrior.

And the second.

Ayano's gaze slightly pointed upwards. The boy's stature was lower than hers. But that top she was looking at was even higher than Kazuma's head.

Approximately two meters.

Held in the hand of the small boy, it was an object of unsuitable size. But even so the boy held it tightly in his small hand.

The jet black handle that was so exceeding the boy's height by that much and the silver blade stretching further was a simple and clear shape forged only for killing people and to destroy one's enemies.

Massive, sharp, piercing and smashing everything.

It was something everyone would understand only after a glance, a very long and boorish spear.

"…"

In silence, the boy thrusts the long spear forward.

Until now, it was positioned next to his waist. He stretched his left foot back on grand scale.

Without saying anything, he only did that. But only by doing that the spear that until now seemed disproportionate turned one with the boy as if it were so from the beginning.

"Kuuh—!"

At the master posture, Ayano reorganized her confused mind. It has nothing to do with she sees.

That is, beyond doubt, an enemy.

Unsheathing Enraiha, she faced the boy. And then— she waited.

She won't make the first move against the spear that has the longer reach. First, she'll let herself be hit and move after.

That was the proper practice. Besides—

Ayano fleetingly looked at Kazuma. If the enemy is a Fujutsushi, this man won't fall behind. If he would fire the same wind blades like before, Kazuma's barrier will definitely endure it.

Using that gap should be good.

"It's coming!"

The boy moved as Ayano expected. He rushed in a big way and pushed out that spear using that force.

Of course, it wasn't a distance the spear would reach but the condensed wind blade fired from the edge of the blade approached the two at the speed of sound.

Ayano concentrated her power on Enraiha.

If she becomes completely defenseless against the wind blade, the fact that it cannot tear down Kazuma barrier, was for her something absolute, a common knowledge.

Therefore, with all her power she trended towards the returning blade, sharpening her consciousness to the utmost limit weighing the timing.

But, that plan was wiped out quick enough.

And in addition to that, by the hand of the partner she put the utmost confidence in- no, by his leg.

"Huh?"

'**Don!**'

The impact that attacked her from her right side sent Ayano flying from that place.

Because it came from a perfectly unexpected direction, she couldn't resist it.

"—Ha?"

At the unbearable scene, her consciousness froze for a moment. But as she could still land even unconscious, Ayano replayed over and over the moment Kazuma's cheek was torn.

"Eeh—Why?"

Her reason refused to recognize it.

That was something impossible, that could never happen and such.

However that was - the meaning of that scene was -

"Wa—Kazuma—"

"You're noisy, shut up! The next one is coming!"

In an unusually violent tone, Kazuma interrupted Ayano's words. Without wiping the blood spilling from his cheek and while a cold sweat was spreading on his brow.

"—No way"

She was still denying it deep in her heart. She had faith in her ideal, her aspiration.

But she had no choice but to recognize the result right now.

In front of the enemy's wind blade, Kazuma's wind barrier was pierced through without resisting for a second.

Ayano's face flipped up in astonishment looking hard at the boy standing before her eyes.

The boy was clearly not boasting of his power but set up the spear indifferently.

In a manner as if to say *this is only natural*.

"This guy, no way - "

Trying to focuse her mind, Ayano could do nothing but admit that she was not yet taking the situation seriously.

Thinking about it, it was an appropriate situation if you exclude all previous assumptions.

As Kazuma is a Contractor, theoretically all Wind Spirits are under his control. Then, another Fujutsushi won't be able to even begin an attack let alone oppose him.

What can overturn that principle, was someone like Kazamaki Ryuya who manipulated spirits that went mad and used Jutsu differently from it's root or, a Jutsushi who was by far more capable than Kazuma.

"No way - someone stronger than Kazuma—?"

A chill ran along the muscles on her spine.

Without minding Ayano's disturbance, the boy pointed the spear to the target.

Without any confusion, it accurately aimed at Ayano.

"This way!?"

Simultaneously with that turned inside out scream, the spear grew hazy.

A certain kill blow that could simply pass through Kazuma's barrier.

Without thinking of blocking it from the beginning, Ayano tumbled in order to avoid it.

She barely escaped.

But, in compensation, her posture was fatally disordered. In the two seconds she needed to reorganize herself - she can die ten times over.

"Kuu."

In those wide opened eyes that forgot even to blink, the boy taking a pursuit stance was reflected.

Facing the unable to move Ayano, the boy unleashed the spear without hesitation.

"You think I'll let you!"

In that space, together with an angry roar, a gale forced its way through.

As if getting angry at being neglected on account of being worthless, Kazuma fired wind blades to the rapidly penetrating wind spear.

But, between the slashing attack and the spear thrust, there was an exceptional difference in their densities.

Not only unable to offset each other, unable to compete for even a moment, the wind blades were quickly crushed.

"Wha…so much bullshit?"

At the overwhelming power difference demonstrated, Ayano was soundlessly petrified.

But, without any sigh of confusion, as if expecting it, Kazuma fired the second and third attack.

When that number reached five, finally the wind spear was negated.

"…This is outrageous," breathed out Kazuma smacking his lips.

Ayano had entirely the same opinion.

By a simple calculation, five times Kazuma's wind strength - to put it bluntly, it was a difference that couldn't even be spoken of.

"…"

The boy turned a colorless gaze to Kazuma but he immediately looked away.

As if literally declaring *You don't exist in my opinion*.

"How cold, mind me a little bit more. If not, I'll sulk."

But, clearly not hesitant about the power difference, with the impudent talk as usual, Kazuma started walking towards the boy.

As if brushing away the enemy approaching in a straight line, the boy wielded the spear as if sweeping sideways.

Kazuma avoided the attack by dunking so low his head touched the ground, and then from that position, a complete forward somersault.

The heel of his right leg vertically described a circle aimed at the boy's head.

"—!!"

The rotating kick that was both offense and defense, as expected, surprised the boy.

Although he blocked it by pushing out the spear above his head, the jet black handle bent because of the clashing impact.

"Kuuh…"

But even so, the boy narrowly survived the blow.

And then in a bold move trying to aim at the gap immediately following, supporting his upside down falling body in one hand, this time with his left foot, Kazuma kicked the boy's leg.

The boy went to his knees.

In the meantime, Kazuma promptly stood up, and just like a whirlwind he applied a roundhouse kick from behind.

"—!!"

Swaying back with all his strength, the boy avoided the kick attacking his temple.

Greatly bending backwards his upper body, he let himself fall just like that, curled his body to disperse the shock and rotated backwards.

Taking a defensive attitude, he escaped Kazuma's offensive range.

"Kuuh…"

"—Humph."

Responding to the boy's glare full of hate, switching over to the standing in one knee posture after rolling three times, Kazuma returned one full of scorn.

Just then, the boy's gaze became even more severe.

Literally rolled in mud by the opponent he was looking down on, he was despised even more. That disgrace was more than he could imagine.

The boy quickly stood up and pointed his spear to Kazuma. He spoke in a squeezed to death voice.

"You bastard…don't get in my way…"

"Oo, the random attacker brat finally uses his mouth."

As if being surprised, Kazuma unnaturally raised one eyebrow.

"…Who's a random attacker?"

"Look closely in the mirror at least once and see what you're doing. It would be best to repent and surrender afterwards."

"…"

The boy already didn't answer to Kazuma's persiflage continuing fluently.

Did he used it all up or had he no intention of replying, in any case, the point of the spear thrust without disturbance was more eloquent than a thousand words, announcing the boy's intent.

But even so, Kazuma didn't lose his composure and confronted him with a daring smile.

Expecting from that attitude that Kazuma found the method of capturing the boy, Ayano's alertness relaxed so she spoke.

"All things considered, this is rare. For you to engage in close combat by yourself without being challenged."

Kazuma's tactic was basically a long distance attack using wind blades.

But despite that his martial arts form was stronger than Ayano's, which the girl found exceedingly annoying—

Anyhow, since Kazuma was especially engaging in close combat, she started thinking that, may be the key to capturing him in those circumstances but — the answer was unexpected in various ways.

With a tendency to pout, as if sulking, Kazuma said.

"But, I can't win with a thing like Fujutsu."

"…You…" murmured Ayano greatly perplexed at that excessively miserable manner of speaking.

"Don't speak '**so shameful so lightly'** you baka! Besides, what the heck does *thing* mean, huh!? Do you think you're at an age where speaking like that is tolerated!?"

"But, you see…"

"Don't <<But, you see…>> me!! Stop talking immediately like a spoiled mama's boy, it disgusts me!"

She finished her sentence in one breath.

That was by no means something insincere, a really bad feeling was spreading on her skin.

"Well, leaving that aside."

In front of Ayano breathing heavily because of too much stimulation, as if nothing happened, Kazuma quickly regained his usual sarcastic manner.

With a light gesture, lacking any feeling of tension, Kazuma pointed forward.

"Our honorable guest is waiting."

"Eeh? Aah—"

Hearing that blunder she completely forgot but right now they were in the middle of the battle.

A formidable enemy like never before holding a spear hiding a tremendous power, he was only aiming at them.

But, very strangely, in spite of Ayano showing a lethal gap, the boy didn't began the attack.

As if he was waiting for them to prepare, he stood still spear ready.

"What is going on—?"

Why did the boy overlooked such a definite gap?

She thought so too when Kazuma kept him in check, there was something strange.

"Just what is this boy trying to do?"

Although seeming to agree with that opinion and he was composedly smiling, his gaze was shooting through the boy without a trace of slackness, trying to feel around his true intention.

But, the boy was thoroughly cold towards Kazuma.

"I have no business with you," he coldly declared with a really apathetic expression.

At that indifferent sentence, Kazuma let out a murmur, all his <<Ki>> coming out.

"Hee—"

"—Tch!"

At that time, with the fastest movement, Ayano grabbed the cuff of his jacket.

Kazuma turned around suspicious.

"What?"

"Right now you, you just thought of abandoning me and running by yourself, right!? That's not going to happen!"

"…Not really, I didn't think something like that."

"Humph, I wonder! But for your information I'll never let you escape! We go to the grave together!"

Looking at Ayano grasping tightly the cuff of his jacket so he'll never run, Kazuma murmured more amazed than ever.

"Why are you expressly taking such a pessimistic decision?"

"But…"

"To begin with, he's not such an opponent that you have to risk your life against."

"…Eeh?"

Involuntarily not believing her ears, Ayano stared at Kazuma.

"Right now…what was that?"

The opponent is someone who might have surpassed even Kazuma, a Fujutsushi *outside human common sense* grade.

And yet, from the way he spoke just now, she didn't feel any sort of threat -

"…I said I have no business with you."

Gazing at the slightly smiling Kazuma, the boy announced for a second time.

And then, with eyes burning with the will to fight, he glared at Ayano.

"The successor of Enraiha! If you say you're the rightful owner of the flame's sacred treasure - then show that power to me!"

With that vigorous shout, the boy took an offensive posture.

The swelling power was kneaded more and more, stronger, sharper.

But, Ayano hadn't yet found the way to oppose the spear facing her.

"W- wait a seco-"

Ayano was flustered but the boy was about to unleash the spear without hesitation. —But, as expected Kazuma couldn't tolerate that in silence.

"I told you I won't let you."

Together with that verdict combined with a smile, the unleashed wind blade drew an arc, attacking the boy from the flank.

To intercept that, the boy unwillingly interrupted his attack.

"Kuu! Don't -"

"Of course I'll get in the way, brat!"

Replying with scorn at the gaze full of hatred, Kazuma calmly blocked the boy's way.

"Because I'm sort of this woman's guard and I receive money for it."

"Guard…?"

The boy's pupils were turned to Ayano full of surprise and anger.

From that gaze it looked like more than the fact that Kazuma was getting in the way so he couldn't defeat her, he condemned Ayano's weakness who had to employ something like a guard.

"And with that, this time I'll be the one to start."

But without caring about such things, Kazuma declared so and then he put it into effect.

From right overhead perpendicularly blowing down, a huge down-burst descended.

The strong wind striking down without a definite aim, shredded the earth cutting everything in touched.

The soaring dust cloud blocked their vision.

While cursing the boy pushed up the spear and lightly twisted his wrists.

The small circle drawn by the spearhead created a strong tornado.

The tornado scattered the down-burst in a moment and coincidentally forced the dust cloud in the atmosphere.

The air was purified. But -

The moment his field of vision cleared, those two figures were nowhere to be seen.

"Did you run away…?," murmured the boy staring in wonder while feeling surprised.

But immediately pulling himself together, he searched for <<Kehai>> in the surroundings.

After several seconds — the boy turned northeast with confident eyes.

However, he didn't chased after them immediately but looked up at the sky with a somewhat dark expression, staring at a distant place.

"…The power of Enraiha's user is only this much? With this…"

That figure murmuring feebly, appropriate for his age, was forlorn like a child on the verge of bursting into tears.

Part 2

Hiding himself in a building in the middle of construction, Kazuma looked annoyed.

"Well, if we could shake him off with this, it would be so easy."

"…"

Ayano was staring at Kazuma with a pure white gaze.

"What?"

"I'm amazed. You said it would be an easy victory but suddenly we're running like some animal with the tail between its legs, huh? "

At that answer loaded with despair, Kazuma looked at the sky as if thinking back on his memory, cocking his head in puzzlement.

"—Did I say something like that?"

"Sure you did. That he's not such opponent you have to risk your life against. "

"Aah, that."

Quickly agreeing on this, Kazuma continued.

"What about you, *why* couldn't you turn against him, do you have a pretext for that?"

"Eeh? No, not really—"

"Then rather that not fighting and thinking about dying, isn't it better to run?"

"Is that what you meant?" Replied Ayano with all her strength.

But, of course Kazuma didn't show a sigh of shyness.

Stuff like *running away is shameful* or *a warrior's pride* that's something that would never come out of this man.

"Good grief…leaving that aside, did you shake him off?"

"Isn't that impossible?" Immediately replied Kazuma, extremely carelessly.

"It's different from when I'm alone, it's because there's an Enjutsushi with me."

The amount of Spirits that accompanied Ayano, the direct descendant of the Kannagi Clan, the highest authority of Enjutsushi was absurdly enormous even in peace times.

Naturally, even the Kehai she emitted was luxurious and gorgeous, giving one the impression it was a billboard and perfectly concealing all that brilliance

was next to impossible even with Kazuma's proficiency.

Although it may be possible for an ordinary opponent, escaping that boy's eye was beyond optimistic.

"Then, what are we going to do?"

"…Why do I have to think about it?"

Kazuma replied to Ayano's question like he was the embodiment of laziness.

"You're the one he's aiming at, right?"

"But, aren't you my partner?" Declared Ayano, in a tone of declaring the reasonable truth.

Kazuma grimaced magnificently.

At the first glance, Kazuma seems irresponsible and practically he is fairly irresponsible but his business ethics are unexpectedly high.

Dishonoring a contract was something that never happened.

Of course, that was not because of his virtuous mind, but because he had a thorough knowledge just how bad it could hurt his business credence — meaning that the reason for that honesty was profit and loss arithmetic and yet Ayano's words unexpectedly poked at that.

"What do you think we should do?"

"Running is best."

Although turning his back to that second question he answered honestly.

"That brat doesn't seem stupid enough to attack the Kannagi Residence, don't you agree? Even if by some chance he does that, Oyaji or the Suzerain will settle the problem but most important is if I take you back home my contract is over."

"…"

Ayano looked at Kazuma, persistently prioritizing his own comfort, with a white gaze.

But, thinking about the way the battle progressed so far, that was understandable.

To Ayano that boy seemed clearly ahead of Kazuma as a Fujutsushi.

Rather than using a different Jutsu, using the same and being defeated by a Jutsushi who has more excellent and had more talent was something she hadn't thought possible.

That is to say, thinking about it rationally, that's how it is. Kazuma cannot win against that boy.

But, even though she saw this man overwhelmed in reality Ayano couldn't imagine this man losing.

The girl's belief in his strength equals to common sense.

"It's impossible for Kazuma to lose."

"—Say, Kazuma."

After hesitating Ayano asked directly.

"Is that child, stronger that you?"

"That brat is nothing impressive by himself."

Unexpectedly, Kazuma declared so without hesitation.

Hearing that answer Ayano felt relief for a moment but it literally didn't go beyond a moment.

"The problem is that spear he has."

"—Aah?"

She saw it during battle - it was shown to her - remembering the spear's tremendous power, Ayano sighed heavily.

"That was an amazing strength. That's the first time I saw a weapon pregnant with so much power."

"…"

With half-opened eyes, Kazuma stared at Ayano murmuring absentmindedly.

He made a blatantly shocked face but Ayano, lost in her own thought, didn't noticed.

"So, what's up with that spear?"

"…"

"—What?"

Finally noticing Kazuma's subdued eyes, Ayano innocently asked. Kazuma quietly turned his gaze away and looked at the blue sky.

"What!?"

"No, it's nothing. But that spear—"

"Do you know of it?"

"That's the first time I saw it so I can't say for sure — it's probably Kokusen."

"What's that?"

"…"

From the reaction until now, Kazuma expected that answer.

He expected it but could do nothing about losing all the strength in his body.

His upper body leaned on the wall slanting. He seemed intolerably attracted to roll over just like that and going to sleep.

"Hey, what's up with that reaction? Just because you're somewhat of a walking dictionary, don't put on airs!"

She thought Kazuma's attitude was an insult so Ayano sulked pouting her lips.

But, even that very lovely gesture couldn't impress him.

"Should I explain for the sake of the baka girl who doesn't know anything…"

After those provocative words used as an introduction, Kazuma briefly explained.

"Kokusen is the sacred treasure of the Wind. The same as your Enraiha."

"—Eeh?"

Forgetting her anger at those impolite words, Ayano stared at him in puzzlement.

That was something very surprising.

She required thirty seconds until she could understand Kazuma's explanation.

"Sacred treasure - of the wind? Then, what about water and earth?"

"I don't know about those but Enraiha of the Fire and Kokusen of the Wind are both famous. Did you really not know?"

"Yeah."

As Ayano nodded quickly, Kazuma looked at the sky.

"Study a bit more, you. If I'm not mistaken, the Fuan family from Hong Kong was supposed to have it but…"

"But, what?"

"But if that brat became the successor, it's impossible that I didn't hear of it. Did he just take over?"

"It's not something that concerns you."

"Well, that's true."

Kazuma responded to the third voice suddenly cutting in the conversation calmly, without becoming confused.

"Wha—"

But, Ayano jumped to her feet. And then, as expected, that silhouette was in her field of vision.

"Did you think you could escape, Enjutsushi?" Informed the boy coldly, holding the spear.

The self-confidence dwelling in his voice — when the searching ability is concerned, the Fujutsushi will always win.

Meaning that an Enjutsushi can't win.

Ignoring Kazuma who was the same, that declaration was bragging about how he was the overwhelmingly superior Jutsushi.

"Play time is over. If you don't want to die demonstrate your power, Enraiha's user"

"Kuu— "

As if overpowered by that determined gaze, Ayano let out a small moan. She looked at Kazuma requesting a counter plan but -

"Why are you still sitting down? Get up already!"

"Huh? Aah, am I getting in the way? Well then, I'll step back a bit more so do your best…"

"Don't fall back! You should fight too!"

He truly didn't display any willingness.

"Besides, you're the one aimed at, no? He went as far as nominating you so, do it by yourself without nominating others."

"Wha—But, you're my escort, aren't you?"

"That's right. That's why, well - how about this? I'll help you if you're about to die so until then -"

It was at the time Kazuma said that in a voice without motivation.

During the time those two ere exchanging such idiotic words, the boy's shoulders trembled as he remained a spectator, without attacking.

He turned to Kazuma with a cold gaze, cold but with a something that was on the verge of boiling dwelling inside.

"*Help you if you're about to die*, huh? Do you think a third rate Fujutsushi like you can stop me?"

A frank disdain thrown at Kazuma together with an ostentatiously derisive laughter.

There's no need to say it, even for a normal human the anger would be insuppressible.

But, Kazuma -

"—Pfff"

Averting his eyes after looking at the boy's face, he made a small snicker.

"Wha- what's so funny?"

"…No, it's because I understand you're doing your best."

With a sidelong glance at the exasperated boy flicking off the derisive mask, Kazuma's laugh made his shoulders tremble.

"Even though you take the *I completely ignore the likes of you* attitude the best you can, since you cannot help but react to every single one of my words, well, it must be because you're young, I think."

"—!"

Suddenly remembering what happened, with a red face the boy was silent.

Seeing that, Kazuma made an even lower laughter.

"You, you bastard…!"

Grinding his teeth at the humiliation of a <<lower rank>> making fun of him, the boy glared at Kazuma.

And then, he thrust the tip of Kokusen at the man who made fun of him so much.

"Isn't this fine? Then, I'll teach you your place first!"

"—Aah?"

Kazuma looked at the boy amazed. This development was obviously unexpected.

Even though he feigned calmness and his inexperience could be seen through because he was not yet able to control his emotions, to go as far as forgetting

his main purpose drained away by immediate fury, what a *child*…

"Hey, why are you doing this?"

"Isn't it fine?"

Ayano's happy voice covered that natural protest.

"If you want to fight with me please knock down this man first, or something like that?"

"…Ayano."

With half opened eyes Kazuma looked at Ayano who declared so for fun.

But he seemed the only one dissatisfied by the situation -

"Fine. You'll be my opponent after."

Unrelated to Kazuma's volition, the stage was rapidly prepared.

"…Why does it become like this?"

The unwilling development made Kazuma astonished.

And then, as if sinking the boot into him even further, Ayano winked at him.

"As expected of my guard. Volunteering your body in that manner to protect me ◎"

"…Well, I don't really mind. This amount is still within the reward. But -"

Unexpectedly, Kazuma obediently accepted the situation. But, as if it was natural, he didn't forget to cynically stab her once.

"If you only fight cheap opponents, no matter how much time passes you won't improve, you know."

"Uuu…I understand that but I think this one is a little bit tricky for me."

"That's not true."

"—Eeh?"

At that declaration without hesitation Ayano unintentionally opened her eyes wide.

But, without saying anything else, with a decisive gait, he stood in front of the boy.

Faced with that attitude full of composure, the boy grimaced with unconcealed discomfort.

"Are you bastards sane? - This late in the game, do you yet not see the the difference in power?"

Kazuma replied with a derisive laugh at those words the boy spat out.

And then, at leisure, he took out his cigarette and lit it.

"Aren't you talkative, brat? You'd be cooler if you shut up."

"—! Then, you should regret ridiculing me in the realm of the dead!"

Together with the angry roar, an unleashed gale blow.

Kazuma jumped sideways in a big way, and at the same time he avoided the attack, he jumped outside the window.

"Hyaaa!"

"You won't run away!"

Although she was outside the fire line, Ayano screamed as broken pieces of concrete that were flaked by the wind blade dashed over her.

But already not minding her, the boy chased straight after Kazuma.

"…Well, for the time being I'm saved, huh?"

While coughing so in confusion, from the window - it was the fourth floor by the way, Ayano overlooked the world.

There, the battle was already reopened.

But then, Kazuma was only escaping and the boy was only attacking so there was the problem that such

an one-sided evolution without any change between offense and defense could be called a battle.

"Well, there seems to be a chance of success so I should leave it to him, no?"

But even so, alone, without panicking, Ayano descended at leisure the flight of stairs, aiming for the ground floor.

Part 3

Facing the man frivolously smiling, with a cigarette in his mouth, the boy unleashed Kokusen without holding back at all.

The high speed blow surging out approached Kazuma, leaving behind only the sound of cutting wind.

"—Huh."

But Kazuma avoided it by jumping aside.

He felt the certain kill blade brushing against his cheek but his smile didn't fade.

"Hey, Speedy! Are you only going to run after having such a big mouth?"

"No, why, I have no problem with you praising my magnificent skills in running away."

"Don't fool around!"

The boy attacked, Kazuma avoided. Their battle repeated just like that.

Kazuma was neglecting the boy's attack, without even warding it off with wind, he was just avoiding it as much as possible.

Was that the best he could do, was his composed smile only a bluff -

"Don't get cocky, small fry!"

"It's not over yet!"

While dodging the certain kill strike, Kazuma bragged in a smiling voice.

After repeating that many times over, Ayano finally arrived to the battle ground.

Looking at the state of the battle, the first thing she said was:

"Aah, you're still alive."

"…Is that what you say after pushing your own battle to others?" Replied Kazuma, looking over his shoulder with half-opened eyes.

Pretending not to recognize it, Ayano turned away.

And then, at that time, the boy chuckled at the exquisite arrangement.

By chance the three were arranged in a line.

If Kazuma were to evade like always from that location, the wind blade will attack Ayano standing behind him.

Without being able to defend, it would be his overwhelming victory.

He cannot evade a blow at full power - the boy concluded so.

"It's my win!"

Convinced of certain victory, the boy dropped his back in a grand scale.

That firm posture that not even a bull could pull was a quiet, instantaneous movement.

"—!"

Together with a soundless yell, the spear became blurry.

While breathing once he unleashed nine attacks. Of course, they were all to kill -

To offset one of the the boy's attack Kazuma needed to attack five times, so no matter whether he was a contractor or not, it wasn't possible to fire forty five attacks in the space of a moment.

"…"

In front of the imminent nine *deaths* Kazuma showed a cold, dry smile. And then, slowly, he pushed out his left hand in front.

As if squeezed out by the hand, nine wind blades were produced.

While dancing like playful fairies, they sweetly, tenderly, softly entwined the wind blade.

The wind influenced by the strong spear was torn off, scattered and run through straight by the coiling wind.

And then, without altering its aim it soundly seized Kazuma's body, blowing through his clothes and hair, making them rustle.

"Wha—?"

"You showed me too much, idiot," Kazuma coldly said over his shoulder to the shocked boy.

"No matter how strong your attack is, if you show it many times over, I will think of one or two counter-measures. What humans can manipulate is not all mighty or absolute. Without even realizing that, you thought yourself invincible just because a somewhat convenient tool happened to fall in your hands, so you lose."

"Kuu…" Murmured the boy in regret.

But Kazuma's points were the truth and had no place for objection.

Since he couldn't make a satisfactory counter attack, he thoughtlessly despised his opponent.

Without thinking of tactics or anything else, he planned on continuing attacking with nothing but brute force but -

Everything was seen through.

He knew what happened.

Kazuma coiled wind like a screw around the spear's wind fired in a straight line and slowly but steadily reduced its power and finally changed it into a gust of wind without any offensive ability.

It seemed easy in theory but putting it into practice was beyond miracle.

To seize them in the space of a moment - he had no other way but to intercept them.

For that purpose not only that transcendent technique that had the touch of divine work was required but the flawless reading of the orbit of his own attack and it's timing, meaning that as a Jutsushi he was completely ahead of him.

There's already nothing he can do against him - he understood that was the definite truth.

Like he was convinced of victory, he cannot pursue Kazuma who was casually stepping up to him so the boy took a step back.

While he was without reservation shortening the distance, Kazuma thought.

"Good grief, how troublesome…"

He didn't have the same amount of strong feelings regarding the boy.

To begin with, he wasn't the kind of opponent he had to fight hard against since the beginning. Not even when taking Kokusen into account.

Even the technique the boy was admiring, for Kazuma it wasn't something he was particularly proud of.

For a Jutsushi it was natural to prepare ten or twenty Jutsu when facing someone who had a stronger hand than you.

The idiots who were under the impression of *I am the strongest*, cannot live long enough in this world.

Without any feeling, Kazuma was simply looking at the boy's bloodless face.

He was thirteen or fourteen. Just a spoiled child.

Even if he's the direct descendant of the Fuan Family, his body is immature, his training ten years at most, even the power he can use doesn't amount to much.

Nevertheless, the reason the brat looked down on all other Fujutsushi and was so conceited to pick a fight with the Kannagi's direct descendant, what's more, the successor of Enraiha, could be only one.

"Certainly, this is a <<handy tool>>," thought Kazuma, looking at the spear the boy held in his hand.

By all rights, it was impossible for him to take so much time against a Fujutsu opponent.

Kazuma was the <<Contractor>> that contracted the Spirit Lord of the Wind which means that all Wind Spirits obey him unconditionally.

But, that spear, Kokusen, as expected of a sacred treasure, seemed to give the proprietor this much ability as if he was a semi-contractor.

That's why, besides removing the seal and completely displaying his contractor power, with Kazuma's power right now, he couldn't steal the boy's control over wind spirits.

"Getting stuck fighting that kind of Fujutsushi, huh? It splendidly wounded my pride -"

While grumbling inside his heart, Kazuma stepped forward in silence.

But, the boy started attacking a second time.

It seems that somehow or another he didn't want to admit defeat but no matter how strong the attack, if it can be seen through, it won't become a threat.

This time it was a counter from the side. He slightly altered the trajectory of the straight going wind spear.

But, that was enough.

All the attacks he continued firing, were avoided as if it were natural, missing their target by a paper thin difference.

Without even making evasive moves, Kazuma walked straight on.

The face of the boy setting up the spear in the front, white and stiff was clear.

In comparison to that, his attack became monotonous and he couldn't handle it anymore.

The last step. He rushed into the space with the physical spear but the pushed out Kokusen was dodged. Simultaneously that handle was casually grasped.

"—Tch!"

"—"

The power of the boy and Kazuma, one trying to draw back the other to snatch away, competed for a moment.

But because Kazuma quickly surpassed him the boy staggered and lost his balance.

"Kuh, let- let-go!"

As he immediately tried to reorganize, with the spear he seized, Kazuma manipulated the boy's center of gravity, not giving him the time to do so.

But even so, the boy doesn't let go of Kokusen - in the end, that was the conclusive cause of defeat.

If he would have let go of the spear he may have reorganized his crumbling balance but because he couldn't do that, he quickly crossed over the limit and fell down.

Of course, Kazuma couldn't overlook that.

"Gaah!"

He beat him to the ground with the boy's own weapon after he plundered the right of control from him, screaming like all air was evacuating his lungs.

"Humph."

And then, even more mercilessly, he trampled on the fallen boy's chest.

That force, enough to smash his heart, made his ribs jar with a thick sound.

"—Aah?"

Suddenly Kazuma closed his eyes partly, and revealed a suspicious voice.

But a moment after he regained his serenity and stepped on the boy, struggling feebly, ruthlessly.

While grinning, he asked perfectly serious.

"Well, how about this - die at once, huh?"

Chapter 2: Water And Earth Raiders

Part 1

Playing with Kokusen with one hand, Kazuma observed the boy struggling under his foot.

It looked pretty painful. The entire body weight of a grown man concentrated in one point on that delicate body - what's more, the boy was trampled straight above the heart so that was expected.

He already couldn't resist in a meaningful way.

The movement of his limbs, rather than those for escape, were closer to death agony convulsions.

But even so, the boy didn't gave up yet. Seizing with his hand the foot trampling him, he was almost powerless but he still had light in his eyes, looking up at Kazuma.

"—*How energetic,*" thought Kazuma indifferently.

He did not hate kids with vitality. As long as they're not annoying him, that is.

Adding one thing to another, he believed in being impartial towards all his enemies.

That is, annihilating men and women of all ages if they oppose him.

Therefore, he had no reason to let this boy live.

It would be better to make him spit out why he was aiming at Ayano but that's not something he should pay attention to.

It happened at the time he was putting strength in his leg to quickly kill him.

Some ill-breading intruders disturbed Kazuma's purpose.

"Ayano!"

"—Eeh?"

Around Ayano's surroundings, blinking at the sudden call, a wind barrier was wrapped up.

Immediately something flying at a high speed was repelled and smashed against the wind barrier.

A small sheet of spray glistened in the sunlight.

"—Water?"

"You two right there, do you have business here?"

Not minding Ayano's confusion, Kazuma asked in a freezing voice.

A replying voice promptly returned.

"Did you notice? Besides, I wasn't particularly hiding my Kehai, you know."

A clear, beautiful voice resounded on the desolate construction site.

Ayano looked around searching for the owner of the voice. As for Kazuma, he didn't even show he was searching and while stepping and jumping on the boy, lazily he puffed his cigarette.

"I asked about your business."

"How impolite."

A voice containing a smile replied. Together with it, two figures appeared on top of a slightly elevated heap of mud.

Appropriate for the owner of the beautiful voice, one of them was an extremely beautiful young man. His silver hair was glittering in the sun like a waterfall, flowing straight down his back. His eyes were amber colored.

He had flawless white skin and thin, fine shaped red lips that were vibrantly contrasting.

He was naturally perfect.

No matter how much one looked at him, not a flaw could be found.

That face was so beautiful it made one believe it must be without a doubt the a human face organized after a single rule - Golden Rule.

But after only glancing at it, Kazuma gazed steadily at the man standing next to him.

He was very short. He had below a hundred and fifty centimeters at most.

But anyone would hesitate calling that man a small built. Surely his stature was low. But even if he was low the volume of muscle that body was clad in, wasn't common.

When describing a muscular giant it's said *"That upper arm is thicker than a woman's ass"* or *"Those tights are like a woman's waist"*.

If the man were above two meters it will be finished one would call him *burly* - but if he's below a hundred and fifty centimeters -

You can only call it birth defect. Even assuming he dedicated all his life to weight training, it doesn't seem likely the human body can become like this.

It could be evaluated to a human's parody or rather a distorted figure (prettiness nonexistent).

The balance of length and width, was perfectly deviating from the contour of the human body. Even the skeleton was wrong.

It could be understood if it were a different species from man.

After staring at that atypical appearance very long, Kazuma coughed once.

"So it's true there are Dwarfs, huh?"

"Wait a second, youngster," the man retorted to Kazuma almost reluctantly.

His voice was a deep baritone, which seemed only appropriate.

"Who is a dwarf, huh?"

"It's obviously you, no? Beside that constitution, you're also carrying an axe."

That's right, the man was shouldering a gigantic battle-axe.

Just like in a certain world famous fantasy movie, his physique seemed very similar to that race.

Besides he was also growing a beard.

"If you want to be consistent to that extent, you should wear a helmet with two horns. Can you split into seven and dance around snow white?"

"Wha…You bastard…"

At Kazuma's abuse, bringing even fairy tales into this, the man glared at him furiously.

But, his mouth didn't seem very proficient so no comebacks emerged.

"Y-you youngster…"

Understanding he couldn't match him verbally, the man grasped with both his hands the battle ax and stepped forward with short steps.

But, his beautiful neighbor restrained him.

"Well, calm down, *imli."

"Who the heck is G*mli?"

Not minding the short one angry and barring his teeth, the beautiful man turned his gaze to Kazuma - no, to the boy trampled on at his feet.

"—This is a somewhat unexpected development, huh?"

Curbing his lips upward, the man addressed the boy. Those red lips were etched with scorn towards a weak person.

But, even that was beautiful. As a god boasting about the superiority of his existence, ridiculing a fallen angel.

"It's not the time to split among friends, right, young prince of the Fuan family - was it? Or rather, you thought that by presenting us with Enraiha, we'll overlook you?"

"Rd…tard…"

With that energy stored somewhere, the boy once again began to act violently underneath Kazuma's foot.

Literally crushing that resistance under his foot, Kazuma looked up at the youth.

"Who are you?"

The young man bowed elegantly and then declared.

"I was slow in saying. I am Christian Roengram - your enemy."

Receiving the young man's - Christian's words, Kazuma's words was etched in a belligerent smile.

"Good vibes, easy to understand. I like that."

"I feel grateful. But - "

Cristian finished his sentence there and looked away. Nearby Kazuma. And then, to where Ayano was standing, in a slightly separated place.

"If you obediently hand over your sacred treasure, I promise not to harm you."

"- So he said. What will you do? "

"That's rejected!" replied Ayano without hesitating for a second.

"Besides I don't like your *I'll overlook you* attitude! *I promise not to harm you*? Do you think you can win against us?"

"Of course."

Chris held out his right hand. On the pointed upwards palm as if trying to receive something, a short pole, thirty centimeters long appeared without notice.

"Why that is, it's because I'm the owner of the Water's sacred treasure, <<Mizuchi>>."

The pole he clasped in his right hand shook. The large amount of water spirits entering through there changed to a whip crossing over ten meters.

"I'll teach you the discrepancy in our status. — Aah, Gaia, I'm plenty by myself. Don't interfere."

"…Humph, very well. A powerless Fujutsushi and an Enjutsushi who can't even win against that, there's no worth dealing with them."

The short man - Gaia, instantly made a dissatisfied face but immediately agreed and jerked his chin as if saying *Go already!*.

Chris bowed to Gaia with a smiling face, and approached Ayano with an air of composure.

"…"

"…"

Kazuma and Ayano, none even throwing a sidelong glance to the approaching Chris, looked at each other.

Ayano asked frankly.

"Is is real?"

"Who knows. It's the first time I heard of a Water sacred treasure."

While answering, Kazuma incorrigibly gridded down the boy acting violently.

"You're persistent. —Ayano, I leave that weird one to you."

"Okay."

Kazuma's gaze, looking at Ayano lightly running, suddenly turned down.

The boy under his foot, was pulling the cuff of his trousers.

Feeling that was an action meant to attract attention not to escape the trampling, Kazuma loosened the force just a little.

"What?"

"…St..op…her…"

While bearing the pain of having his chest crushed, the boy boy spoke disconnectedly.

"That woman…can't…match him…She'll be…killed…"

"That so? "

Kazuma was thoroughly calm. The gaze with which he looked at those two, about to start fighting, didn't had a fragment of nervousness.

"Well, shut up and look. What you wanted to see, from here on you'll be able to see freely."

Kazuma smiled lightly at the boy who didn't seem to understand.

"The serious Kannagi Ayano."

Intended to be composed, Chris didn't start but waited for Ayano slashing attack.

Matching the moment Ayano raised Enraiha overhead, at that moment he lightly twisted his wrist.

The flame sword swung downward from above her head was ambushed from underneath by the water whip.

The sound of water soaking a heated frying pan reached their ears. Simultaneously, both were covered by white water vapor.

But, the atmosphere turned clear in a moment. Mizuchi absorbed the surplus water in the atmosphere.

The water whip completely stopped the flame blade. Only the surface that touched continued to evaporate. That was almost nothing compared to the entire water volume.

But, successively compensating that loss from the surroundings, the whip couldn't be severed.

Cool-looking while the burning blade was before his eyes, Chris laughed.

"An Enjutsushi tackling a Suijutsushi. Water trumps Fire - do you not know the rivalry between the five elements?"

"Ara, I know it. Wasn't it all about the amount of material resources?"

There was no appearance of impatience in Ayano's eyes. Including even more power in the blade, she made the golden flame erupt.

"Kuh!"

Chris' voice was confused for the first time. The whip was bisected close to the root, and Mizuchi leaped in his hand, nothing more but a stick.

"So- something like this…"

From those red lips that looked a little pale, a murmur of astonishment leaked out.

It was the ideology of the cosmic dual forces - Ying and Yang and the five elements.

The elements the world was composed of - Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, all phenomena became by the interference of those elements, that's what it meant.

There are two types of interference, one that takes advantage of one other and they can work together and the other, where there is a killing rivalry between them.

For example, the Earth is raising Wood (vegetation). Therefore the Earth makes Wood alive. On the contrary, Metal (the metal blade) cuts down Tree. Therefore, Metal trumps Tree.

And then, Water trumps Fire. That is the law derived from Chinese cosmology.

But think about it. Certainly Water makes Fire disappear. In that case, did the brilliant, primitive fire disappear with just a cup of water?

Water is also stronger than Fire. But that is not something absolute. It was just something relatively favorable.

In the first place, the basic concept of Spirit Jutsushi is the theory of the four elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Wind.

"Haaaah!"

While it may be true that Ayano's enemy was a Suijutsushi, she is swinging Enraiha without hesitation.

Ayano's way of thinking is always simple. And so, it suited her and made her stronger.

Today is a good example of it.

Water trumps Fire? What about it?

Regarding the energy it's able to release, there's nothing that equals <<Fire>>. No matter how much predominance <<Water>> has -

"How can I lose? To the likes of you!"

"Meeh, kuuh!"

Chris drew to himself the water that was cut off trying to reconstruct the whip once more but that spanned a few seconds.

In front of Enraiha at full power, Mizuchi was literally doing nothing more but pouring water on hot stone.

Torn piece by piece, Mizuchi wasn't even allowed to keep the whip shape.

Overhead Chris, all his power stolen, the blade clad in flame was approaching.

"I got you!"

But, together with a hard sound, the certain kill blow was obstructed.

Mizuchi lost the water whip. Pushing out that handle, Chris intercepted he blow.

As expected of a sacred treasure, even by using the red-hot blade, she couldn't smash that handle. But -

"Kuu…uu…"

Even if he stopped the blow of the blade itself, he couldn't protect himself against that calorific value.

The golden flame was scorching and both of Chris' hands gripping the handle at both ends gave off a burned smell.

His flushed face was strained by anguish and closely packed sweat drops were coming loose.

"Me…Ooohh!"

While stopping Enraiha's blow, Chris fired a kick in desperation. Without going to far, Ayano evaded the kick taking her distance.

"Wh…what's going on?"

Underneath Kazuma's foot, the boy opened his eyes wide in shock.

"Isn't she like a different person from when I faced her?"

"Huh? Yeah."

Kazuma nodded to the boy's shout like it was only natural.

"Because she's not the kind of person to get serious if the opponent has no thirst for blood."

"Did she realize!?"

"…Hey"

Kazuma overlooked the boy that was plainly amazed.

"Didn't you say it yourself: *Show me your power*?"

Which means the boy's purpose wasn't to kill Ayano but to grasp her ability - meaning, trying her ability.

"Well, that Ojou-san may have forgotten about it."

"—?"

"Didn't she notice it with her wildlife sixth sense? Because she's a living thing that moves only on instinct."

The moment he said that, red hot plasma crashed into the wind barrier. Of course, Ayano fired one of Enraiha's blows without even turning around.

"—Wah?"

Dumbfounded the boy looked at Kazuma, who shrugged his shoulders like nothing happened.

"Right now…that was the real deal."

"Hmm, how to say this, she kind of misunderstands it for tsukomi. I'm kind of worried if she'll kill someone before long."

"You there! Don't say whatever you want!"

This time she made a verbal tsukomi.

Maybe because she was composed enough, while overlooking Chris reconstructing his water whip without interfering, Ayano glared at Kazuma with an angry look.

"There's no need to worry, except you I wouldn't do this to anyone!"

"And I'm Ok? If you hit me I will die, you know?"

"You'll die? I won't stop you."

At Kazuma's unnaturally miserable manner of speaking, Ayano replied eternally indifferent.

Ant then, she looked at Chris as if remembering him and smiled with composure.

"You seem to be in a sort of pinch so is it all right not to beg your fellow's help? Your dramatic pose when you appeared and your words were all detestable but I understand - isn't it important to understand one's place?"

"…Tch!"

Those words loaded even with pity, magnificently irritated Chris' pride the wrong way.

The hand grasping Mizuchi trembled and the water whip undulated in a big way.

"Girl…!"

Flinging off his graceful smile and pointlessly polite words, Chris glared at Ayano with the look of a demon.

"You damaged the sacred treasure because I was going easy on you so don't get carried away!"

"I think excuses are unsightly, I really do."

"Shut up!"

Together with that angry roar, Chris held Mizuchi over his head. The water whip stretched upright, its volume swelling.

That was like a water chain iron ball. The endless materialization of water spirits, swelled the apex of the whip to a lump of water ball.

It's diameter was a little more than ten meters - forming the huge water ball reaching a volume of a few hundred tones, Chris shouted.

"I'll smash you! There won't remain a trace of you!"

"With only that?"

Without minding that overwhelming mass swung downward at her Ayano resolutely stepped into his territory.

The several hundreds tons water ball approaching from overhead.

What met it was only a swung brilliant red blade.

That was without a doubt a real spectacle of a courageous but doomed resistance. A different scale from loss or defeat.

“Stop—!”

Including the expectation for the result of the crash, the boy screamed from the bottom of his lungs.

But Ayano, without hesitation, raised the sword overhead with all her power.

Kazuma too, didn't seem like he was going to stop her, and was just looking at her.

The water ball dropped at high speed. Including its mass to the fall velocity, there wasn't any living thing that could bear that kinetic energy of the crash.

Whether it was an African elephant or a grisly bear, they would be squashed in an instant unable to withstand the pressure, unable even to preserve their original form.

But, the sword facing it was called Enraiha.

That mass was equivalent with trash, the quantity of heat it possessed was not something to be outdone by that.

"Yooooooooou! Flyyyyyyyy!"

Together with an outcry not very, or rather excessively - unladylike, as if challenging it, Ayano sliced the sky.

Th golden flame clad on the blade, fiercely sparkled so beautiful striking their eyes.

The gushing out white hot plasma. Similar to a small sun, that hit the huge water mass, pierced it and made all that mass evaporate.

But even so Chris didn't seem disturbed. Rather, he was staring at Ayano holding Enraiha smiling quite sadistically as if he did what he wanted to.

Also, underneath Kazuma's foot, the boy was biting his lips with a regretful expression.

One instant after - a terrific detonation sound roared.

Let's look over the basic science at this point.

When you apply heat to water it undergoes the process of vaporization and becomes steam.

That volume ratio is 1: 1700 —the instant it vaporized the volume expanded a thousand and seven hundred times.

It this was a small quantity, or rather vaporized gradually, it doesn't matter that the thousand fold becomes twice ten thousand.

But, if a huge volume of water is super heated, it will vaporize in an instant.

The volcanic eruption is similar to this. The underground water is vaporized by burning magma, it ex-

pands, and with that pressure it blows off the rocks on the surface.

It's a phenomenon called water vapor explosion.

Yes, an explosion.

The evaporation of water, only that phenomenon can create so much destructive energy to physically alter the topography.

Right now, what happened in front of their eyes was exactly that.

"…Ridiculous…to go this far…"

Looking at the mist enshrouding the center of explosion, the boy's face was distorted by despair.

With that kind of explosion, there was no way for the humans inside to survive. To say nothing of the fact that this was a water vapour explosion.

A Suijutsushi can can control the water vapor but an Enjutsushi has no way of interfering with an fireless explosion.

Which means, she lost.

The greatest war potential that could fulfill his dearest wish will turn to nothing and achieve nothing.

The boy turned that unbearable anger against an opponent within reach. Looking up at the man who was yet still trampling him, he shouted full of emotion.

"Why? Why didn't you stop her? You knew something like this would happen!"

"—Well, this is the reasonable outcome."

While smoking his cigar so carefree so late in the game, Kazuma replied in a voice without energy.

Faced with that indifference of not even raising an eyebrow at the death of his friend, the boy glared at him.

"Bas- bastard…bastard!"

"By the way — I have a feeling I wanted at least one explanation beforehand, Ojou-san."

"I believe in you, partner◎ '!

At that dispirited murmur that didn't seem to appreciate the situation, a bright lively voice replied.

"—Eeh?"

With a look of shock the boy stared inside the mist. Inside his blurry field of vision, two shadows were floating.

Christian Roengram holding Mizuchi who once again became just a handle and a girl setting up a brilliant red blade clad in golden flame.

It was obvious who that was.

It wasn't clear how but Ayano came out of the desperate predicament without even a wound and was appearing calm.

"Wh- why…" murmured the boy dumbfounded.

For Chris too, that seemed unexpected and stared at the girl's silhouette as if doubting his eyes.

"Absurd…why, are you alive…?"

Ayano showed a fearless smile to Chris who murmured so, his certain victory undermined.

At that time, the boy noticed.

That without the enshrouding mist flowing, without the atmosphere moving, the clothes and hair of the girl standing rock still were gently fluttering.

As it was to be expected, in an instant the boy saw through its meaning - and who was behind it.

One moment later, Chris reached the same answer.

The gazes of the two, dyed in shock and shudders turned to Kazuma's disinterested face.

"You son of a bitch…a wind barrier, in that moment you…" squeezed Chris with eyes covered in hatred.

The Enjutsushi Ayano had no way of escaping from that explosion. Then, there is only one answer.

"You have no time to look away, lady-killer."

"—Tch!"

Calming down with Kazuma's words, Chris turned to the front.

Making Enraiha shine brilliantly, Ayano was drawing near in front of him.

At once ordering the water spirits, Chris reconstructed Mizuchi's water whip. Luckily, there was a vast amount of water drifting in the atmosphere in the form of water vapors and he could summon them - he was supposed to.

"Wha—?"

The drifting about mist, for some reason didn't listed to Chris's command.

The water whip didn't materialize at all but, Enraiha was already swung downward. He had no Jutsu to escape from that blow.

"Kuu…uuu…!"

With Mizuchi's handle, Chris stopped Enraiha once more.

While moaning with the agony of having his fingers burned, he forced it back with all his strength, and took his distance tumbling in a big way.

While his shoulders trembled with intense pain and his breathing was heavy, Chris glared at Kazuma with a bloody mouth.

He did not know what he did. He didn't know it but he instinctively knew. That what hindered his ability was nothing else but that man's action.

Replying with sneer at the gaze full of hatred, Kazuma declared carelessly.

"Since it's different from the water itself, water vapor is within a Fujutsushi's range. That's because it's vapor. You'd better not think you can manipulate it that easily."

"You bastard…"

"That's why I told you you have no time to look away."

Although Chris was exasperated by Kazuma's boasting composed facial expression, it certainly wasn't the time to do that.

Using that chance that opened for a moment, Ayano drew near once more.

Enraiha was held aloft. The blade wearing the golden flame increased its brilliance much more, shedding so much light it couldn't be looked at directly.

If he were to block it the same way, even though Mizuchi would be safe, his fingers would probability evaporate.

However, he had no time to summon more water spirits and he already lost the chance to evade.

"Hii…"

Chris' refined good looks became stiff with fear.

He couldn't run, an absolute death was drawing near, and then -

"Fall back!"

"—Tch!"

Reflexively responding to Kazuma's voice, Ayano leapt in a big way. Immediately following, before Chris' eyes, the ground raised and an earth fang with a sharp tip slanted forward - if Ayano were to go right ahead, it was pushed out in a direction she would have intersected.

"Kuh!"

"Gaia!?"

"_"

Everyone's gaze headed for the man - Gaia, who was supposed to have sightseeing the fight from a separate place.

While striking his shoulder with the axe as if taking its rhythm, Gaia's lips warped and he showed a bitter smile.

"It's very boorish interfering in a honor duel but I cannot abandon my colleague. Don't think bad of me."

"It's obvious I'll think bad of you, idiot. You said you won't interfere. If you're a warrior even as a joke don't behave so disgraceful as to violate your oath before the fight!"

The moment he understood that his opponent valued things like honor or pride, something that had no importance to Kazuma, he took advantage of that.

"You came out when that man was about to die. So, as a penalty for violating your oath, at least cut one of your arms!"

"…Don't get excited, youngster," replied Gaia in a crushed to death voice.

"Besides, you were to one to excessively meddle in those two's fight."

"What the fuck are you saying? That man of gentle manners and delicate features, didn't he said he'll take all of us by himself? I participated in the battle since the beginning. Don't put me together with your underhanded, cowardly sneak attack!"

"Guu…meee…"

As expected, if they quarreled, it was Kazuma's complete victory.

Sealing more of the enemy's interfering shielding himself behind the pride of a warrior together with justifying himself and the negation of the opponent's modus operandi, that cajolery could be called brilliant.

""Since it's like that, ignore us and let us continue."

"I won't!"

In accordance with Kazuma's words, the moment Ayano tried to start moving, Gaia swung his battle axe a second time.

That blow literally tore the earth and the pebbles raised from that high speed blow obstructed her path, changing into a wall.

"This time, you'll play with me, Miss."

Part 2

Receiving that gaze full of hostility pointed towards him rather comfortably, Gaia announced magnificently.

"As far as it goes, let me name myself. I am Gaia. I have no family name. And then -"

Gaia pushed out the axe he was holding. What was dwelling in the blade with a dull shine was the power of the earth, strong enough to make one shiver.

From the development until now it was easy to guess its true colors.

"This is the sacred treasure of the earth - it's name is Nozuchi. Recognize it."

And then, as expected Gaia said those words.

"Geez…what's up with this, one after another…" murmured Ayano as if mourning.

That reaction was only justified. If Gaia's words were true, the sacred treasures of four elements gathered.

It must have been the first time since the dawn of history.

But clearly, Gaia wasn't affected by that deep emotion. The bright smile plastered to that boorish face was the sigh of great joy when meeting a formidable enemy - belonging to a race of people who found in fighting their reason for existence, without controlling that smile, the man took one step forward.

"Being able to overwhelm Chris in a woman's body - it seems we underestimated you. It was more pleasant that I thought."

And then, while coughing really happy he looked down at the boy held down under Kazuma's foot, turning a clear scorn towards him.

"At the very least, much more so that a certain ostentatious Fujutsushi family."

"—!!"

The moment he heard those words, the boy squeezed an unbelievable amount of power from that weakened body and escaped Kazuma's restriction.

"Ups."

His balance destroyed, Kazuma staggered. It may perhaps be believable that he made such an unusual error but since even Kokusen was taken from him, that was clearly his intention.

With the regained wind's secret treasure in his hand, the boy turned bloodshot eyes full of hatred to Gaia.

"Otou-sama's enemy!"

"—Humph."

With the expression of not being interested, Gaia snorted and expected the boy's rush.

"Aaaaaaaah!!"

The jet black spear flashed. The point of the blade that seemed split by the excessive speed was carrying an overflowing killing intent was aiming at its bitter enemy.

"Huh, it's fast."

Maneuvering Nozuchi, Gaia continued handling those high speed thrusts. But, by nature, an axe is not a weapon aimed at defending.

Although avoiding those aiming for his vitals, the attacks he couldn't handle gave his body countless wounds.

"Ooooooooooo!"

The boy continued attacking incessantly without a break.

Accelerating the speed's rotation even more, finally even the afterimage disappeared. But as if disregarding that attack, Gaia raised Nozuchi across his head on a grand scale.

Without minding the spurts of blood that covered all his body, his recognition and muscles expanded.

"Huaa!"

With just one blow, he knocked down the countless thrusts, and even blew away the boy's body.

"Guh…hah…"

"How worthless."

Staring at the moaning boy knocked to the ground with coldness, Gaia spat out.

"The attacks of you Fujutsushi are certainly fast. But it's only that. Something like an attack without weight it's only a diversion and not the finishing blow. That's the limit of Fujutsushi — after all they're not a class made for battle."

"…"

At the Chijutsushi's reckless words, Ayano instinctively stole a glance at Kazuma's face.

There was nothing particularly strange about that countenance. But -

"…Kazuma?"

With the same aimless manner as always, Kazuma picked up Kokusen, separated from the boy's hand and directly confronted Gaia separated by a few meters.

"Hoo — are you motivated, Fujutsushi?"

"Ayano."

Entirely ignoring the mocking tone, Kazuma turned his face only to Ayano.

"You don't have to worry about this. You should finish the small fry on the other side. "

"Ah, yeah—"

"Wa- wait…"

At the time she reflexively nodded, a moan hoarse with agony called Kazuma to a halt.

Turning there, the boy unable to get up yet after being blown off, stretched his hand with a desperate expression.

From his mouth fresh blood was falling out of, a slender voice was released.

"That's…not something…you can handle…"

"By the way, that's true," nodded Ayano agreeing.

"Can you use a spear?"

"No, I never touched one."

Kazuma readily replied.

"But—"

Compared to that he quickly turned around the spear in his hand holding it between his arm and armpit with the same expression full of confidence and composure like always.

The way he handled the spear, without hesitation and openly fluid, was absolutely not amateur-like.

"I used a cane though. If I put that to practical use, well, I should manage somehow."

"—I see. Well then, do your best."

Ayano sent Kazuma out with a tone that was visibly casual. She wasn't particularly shocked.

More that the fact that this man said he *should manage somehow*, she understood from the experiences until now that whatever the progress may be he will, one way or another come on top.

"Wa- wait…"

The boy who was the original possessor of the spear, seemed to have a different opinion yet.

He tried to stop him a second time but Kazuma already didn't look back.

As a substitute Ayano looked over the boy and asked.

"Is there something else?"

"Of…of course there is! My family came to inherit Kokusen a long time ago, it can't be suddenly used by an outsider who is just a little bit talented!"

"Ah, I see."

Now that you mention it, it was a justified fear - if you apply common sense to your thinking.

But.

Ayano deliberately spoke, not of the same opinion.

"Well, isn't it fine either way?"

"Of course not!"

The boy who as a matter of course couldn't consent, objected to this.

At the same time, Kazuma carelessly pushed out the spear.

Just by looking it was an unenthusiastic throw. But the wind blade that gushed out from that spearhead, clashed into Nozuchi lightly crossing the speed of sound.

"Meee…"

Having that heavy unendurable power pushed into him, Gaia's upper body was bent backwards. While he immediately planted his feet on the ground he was unable to stop the blow and backed off while staggering.

"—Eeh?"

"Wow—"

'I see. This — is very convenient."

While stared at by the boy who murmured like a mentally slow, Kazuma let out a voice of admiration without accent.

"Wha—"

"Well, one would normally be surprised," thought Ayano, aiming a look of sympathy at the astonished boy.

That's right, if you think about this normally, it was something impossible.

The famous Fuan Family famous as the highest Fujutsushi continued inheriting for a long time the Wind sacred treasure, Kokusen.

An outsider who only managed to get his hands on it couldn't handle it right away.

But, lucky or unlucky, in this time there was a being who was laughing scornfully at that kind of common sense.

The '**Contractor'** - the one who contracted with the Spirit Lord of the Wind, the monster who although was was called the weakest, a Fujutsushi, was more than a match for the Enjutsushi from the Kannagi Clan.

"Well then, let's continue, shall we?"

With an outward appearance that didn't look like it in the slightest, that legend came alive, together with that effortless pronouncement, unleashed the spear one after another. While Gaia barely received with Nozuchi, he continued to back off pressed down by that power blow after blow.

"Guu…meeeh…"

Kazuma's attack was so swift it didn't seem to be the same kind like the boy's and it was heavy.

Although he didn't had a large build, his center of gravity was low and he was very muscular, Gaia stepped firmly into the ground like any Chijutsushi would, but even so it was very unusual he couldn't hold out against him.

"Meeeeaaah…"

Gaia was driven into a one sided defence. He couldn't even grasp a clue on how to attack.

If he were to give up on his defence and brandish his axe, in that moment the wind blades would make a great number of holes in his body.

No - even now, he couldn't defend against his wind blades. The fact that Kazuma's attack was hitting Nozuchi and didn't struck Gaia was because Kazuma was naturally aiming at the axe.

He was being played with - although he understood that, Gaia couldn't do anything.

Those serial attacks he couldn't confirm by sight didn't become abate but on the contrary, raised their frequency even more.

"Kuuh…wa, so fast."

"No, is that all they're worth?"

Using Gaia's previous words against him, Kazuma cheerfully bragged.

"You…youngster…!"

At the disgrace of being looked down upon by *the likes* of a Fujutsushi, Gaia grounded his teeth. And finally made his decision.

Believing in his own tenaciousness more than in the fact that he was pressed down until now, he cast away his defence and brandished Nozuchi.

He was slightly slow. Or else, together with Gaia's resolution and good fortune, Kazuma stopped the monotonous attack and took another approach.

The aim were Gaia's legs.

Throwing away the daring sharpness, the wind attack pierced the earth like a blunt weapon. That shock similar to an explosion blew up a large quantity of dust.

"Kuuh - Don't underestimate me!"

But, the opponent was a Chijutsushi. A curtain of earth and sand was nothing more but a smoke screen.

Recovering from that moment of surprise, Gaia got rid of all the dust swinging one arm.

"Whaa—"

The moment his field of vision cleared up, Gaia screamed in shock once again. Suddenly in front of his eyes, he recognized the figure of his opponent separated only by a few centimeters but that was only to be expected.

Gaia understood completely the sneer rising to Kazuma's mouth.

This man, without missing that space of one moment necessary to remove the smoke screen, avoided being sensed by a Chijutsushi by jumping without running on the land and moved closer to him in an instant.

He certainly understood. But, only understanding it is useless - even so, he couldn't react.

"Kuuuuhh!"

"Slow."

Shortly informing Gaia, who was trying to prepare his axe in confusion, Kazuma suddenly rotated the spear.

The end of the black handle - the sharp part, knocked the short man off his feet.

"Meeeh!?"

His feet tripped up in such a skillful manner, Gaia splendidly danced in the air.

The feeling of his body floating horizontally in the sky. But, that feeling that aroused some kind of pleasantness instantly turned to shivers when he recog-

nized Kazuma's silhouette hanging over him from above.

"I managed somehow with a such a weightless attack, huh?"

What dwelt in his voice and attitude was plain mockery. The naked blade glistening in his hand, was already sharply sung down aiming at the nape of his neck.

Rather than capitalizing on its length the true worth of that long-handled spear was the phantasmagoria consecutive attack resembling a circular motion.

To use both ends of the handle to attack it wasn't necessary to slash back like with a sword but to repeat the strike over and over as long as the momentum of the same vector could be maintain.

That speed was obviously more that twice as faster that a sword. At the same time one end of the handle tripped and sprung him up, the blade at the reverse side was swung downwards.

"What kind!"

But, at that moment, Gaia extended his short arm with all his might and seized the ground. Responding to the silent command, the ground transformed to a

firm shield and protected him and then, changing to a sharp lance, it attacked Kazuma.

"—Ha."

Laughing at the futile resistance, in one single blow Kazuma pulverized both shield and spear.

Successively turning around Kokusen as if drawing the letter **S**, he blew off Gaia with the dull point.

"Gaahaah!"

Gaia rolled like a kicked ball and rushed into the building's wall.

And then, at the same time -

"Guubuh!"

As if it was covered by the sound of the crash, from the upper air a dull, heavy moan resounded.

Looking up to search for that voice, in the center of Gaia's field of vision, he recognized the figure of his companion magnificently dancing in midair.

But, judging from that posture with limbs danging loosely and his pushed up chin, it was clear he didn't jump by his own volition.

After the long, long flight passed, Chris landed on his back.

A moment after he made a small bounce. he twitched and stopped moving. As it seemed like he could barely breath, it was impossible for him to continue the battle.

"…"

Slowly, as if looking at something he didn't want to, Gaia turned his eyes in the direction Chris came flying from.

Just like he imagined, carrying Enraiha on her shoulder, her other hand on her hip Ayano was looking down this way.

"…"

Even slower, he turned his head around ninety degrees.

The man who blew him away so far, likewise, was holding Kokusen in one hand.

"Well then."

Noticing that gaze, Kazuma showed a fearless smile.

"This is checkmate," he mercilessly pronounced.

Looking at Gaia who paled at the desperate crisis, Kazuma thought how to deal with them.

Without letting even several seconds pass, the answer came out.

It was *"They're bothersome so I'll kill them."*

What was their relationship with the boy, why did they wanted to steal Enraiha, it would be a lie to say he really didn't care.

But, in the end, that was someone else's problem.

The boy, the Kannagi, they should all deal with their respective duty so Kazuma set up Kokusen to finish both of them off.

"…Do you think you won with this?"

"That so? I think that depends upon you. If you still want to persist, I'll deal with you a little longer."

Declaring the unexpressed <<*at any rate the result will be the same*>> he was about to unleash the sword but this time Gaia finally took the initiative.

"Don't get cocky, youngster!"

Together with the angry roar, Gaia knocked his fist into the ground. Immediately following, from that origin cracks ran on the ground freely.

Although they weren't big enough that people would fall into them, naturally the ground was violently shaking.

Unwillingly, Kazuma interrupted his attack.

"Well, as expected you're going to struggle, huh— "

But even so, he didn't lost his composure and assumed an attack stance a second time while laughing sarcastically but, when he shifted his attention to the ominous sounds coming from overhead - he instantly stopped his movement.

"Tch."

On the outer wall of the building in the middle of construction, several cracks clearly impossible to repair started running.

The outer wall that was originally organized in a straight line was insecurely undulating which was a clear omen of collapse even to inexpert eyes.

"Don't be so rash, you guys—hey?"

When accidentally looking back, Gaia and Chris were gone. He only heard the voice appearing out of nowhere.

"This was a draw! Next time we won't go easy on you so prepare yourself!"

"…Don't exit with such witty words, Ossan."

At that parting threat fully loaded with the taste of the loser so much it was stereotypical, Kazuma let out a cough of admiration.

But, this was not the place to calm down. The destruction of the building was drawing near before his very eyes.

Looking up, the concrete already started peeling off. At this rate, it will hold on only a few seconds more.

Moreover, based on dangerous slanting it won't be smashed right below but blown out - moreover, it's facing this way - it will certainly collapse.

"—Hmmm."

Understanding that much, Kazuma turned around and started running without looking right nor left.

Helping his partner, defend against a secondary calamity, clearly not thinking about any of that, he escaped so fast he deserves admiration.

"Hey, Kazuma!? Wait a minute!"

On the other side, Ayano doesn't have the merit (in a bad way) of abandonment like Kazuma.

While turning a gaze full of resentment to the partner who doesn't show any sigh of slowing down when calling him, even so she couldn't overlook this calamity.

"Geez…"

It was lucky - it can be said so, that she learned how to practically deal with this kind of situation.

It's already too late to stop the destruction. But, if that huge mass were to crash into the earth, the damage on the surrounding will be significant. Then —

"I'll burn everything to nothing —"

Ayano raised Enraiha overhead with all her power. The golden flame that gushed out of the crimson blade spread around the collapsing building as if wrapping it up and made that entire mass evaporate.

A few seconds after, at the time the fire disappeared, the building in bare concrete completely vanished leaving only the foundation.

In other words, the results of a few months of construction work came to nothing.

"Aah— but, because of that Chijutsushi's last attack they should have started from soil preparation all over again…it can't be helped."

And so, when she tried to justify herself from the back the sound of apathetic applause could be heard.

Ayano looked over her shoulder with a dangerous face.

She understood without having to look but as expected, Kazuma was standing there with a frivolous, slack smile.

"Ya, good job."

"—Didn't you ran away?"

"I ran away because it was dangerous. Since it's not dangerous anymore there's no need to run. It's a matter of course," replied Kazuma nonchalantly.

Having a thorough knowledge of how meaningless it was to search about something sincere in this

man, Ayano changed the conversation without deeply questioning him.

"Those two?"

"They ran away."

"Didn't you let them ran away?"

As expected she investigated this.

The interval he took his eyes off them, preoccupied with the building's destruction, he let them ran away — it doesn't seem strange but Kazuma is a Fujutsushi.

There wasn't any particular need to specially turn towards the collapsing building but even assuming so for the sake of the argument, he shouldn't have *taken his eyes off* those two.

For Kazuma, tuning his senses to wind spirits, looking at two places at the same time was mundane, something he didn't even had to concentrate about.

But, Kazuma persistently played dumb.

"Not really, I didn't let them go. I just didn't felt like pro-actively catching them."

"Why…?"

"Because it's someone else's problem."

Those words that for Ayano seemed unbelievable, didn't even had a tiny amount of guilty conscience.

"They're aiming at you and that brat, not me. There's no need to unjustifiably bring them down."

"You…"

Although Ayano couldn't agree to Kazuma's matter-of-course declaration, she couldn't verbally abuse him -

"Well, leaving that aside, we should leave this place already. It will become noisy."

- Because she was forced into silence by Kazuma's next words.

"…Yeah."

Reluctantly Ayano agreed.

The Police and Fire Department will arrive any minute. She could silence them by using the Kannagi name but it is better to have few of that troublesome attention.

"First of all, let's change the location."

Saying so, Ayano and Kazuma left that place behind.

Part 3

Narrowly hiding themselves from the Police, Fire Department and the large number of people that gathered there, those two took a short rest in a small park.

Ayano grumbled, glaring.

"Geez, why do I have to sneak out like some kind of culprit? But since I became familiar to you I kind of got used to it."

"Hey, wait a minute! You're the main cause of the uproar this time. I was just dragged into it."

"I'm also a victim! To make matter worse, since you let the enemy escape, I don't know anything about their reason."

"Now that you mention it, that's right. What are they trying to do, picking a fight with the Kannagi with that level of power -"

While speaking, Kazuma suddenly moved his line of sight. At the same time, he took a small step back.

In front of his eyes, a small figure passed through at a fair amount of speed.

Ayano was faintly surprised and Kazuma, thoroughly indifferent, let the shadow - the retreating figure of the Fujutsushi boy pass.

“Kuuh.”

The boy charging in with the intention of a surprise attack nimbly turned around and faced Kazuma.

This time he put himself of guard, his back dropping, as if carefully searching for an opportunity.

“The brat from earlier, huh — Did you follow us? What a persistent jerk.”

The boy shouted at Kazuma who spoke so like he was disgusted.

“Give it back!”

“—Aah?”

“Give it back! Kokusen is mine!”

That’s when he noticed. The boy’s gaze wasn’t turned towards Kazuma but towards what Kazuma was holding in his hand.

The object that became so familiar to him he actually forgot he was holding it in his hand was, in the end, a borrowed thing.

It was only natural for the boy to chase after it since it was taken away.

"Then say so from the beginning."

While Kazuma spoke even more astounded, he held out Kokusen's handle in front of him. As if leaping, the boy tore it off.

"Your manners are pretty bad - ", grumbled Kazuma blind at his own shortcomings with a backward glance at the boy who hugged Kokusen closely with an expression of relief.

But not later than that, that face had a cramp.

"Eeh…wah…"

Letting out a confused voice, the boy patted the spear all over with both his hands.

Next he pushed it to the sky as if including feeling into it and pressed the handle against his forehead.

In the end he started swinging it as making a pattern.

"What is he doing?"

"Who knows. The dance of victory handed down in the family?"

"…They're not some kind of aboriginals, right?"

To make matters worse, that didn't have the *flow* that could give the impression of a dance, its integrity.

Judging from the way it was nonsensically yielded, it looked like simple confusion.

After a short while, trepidly watching over it, the boy suddenly stopped his (looks like) dance. And then, he stood rock still in blank amazement.

That sad sight, was like *the portrait of despair* came alive.

If a human with an honest heart were to be there, it was impossible not to feel pity.

"…Did something happen?" asked Ayano worried, as expected.

With a dumbfounded expression, perhaps not even understanding who was asking, the boy answered in a small voice.

"Kokusen…is not answering…"

"—Eh?"

Ayano was befuddled, not comprehending what the boy was saying. But, the next moment, understanding the reason of it, she nodded deeply.

"Aah, I see."

In a way, it was to be expected.

Kokusen crossed over to the present day's - no, if it's unlucky possibly the all-time-highest Fujutsushi,

the <<Contractor>> who contracted the Spirit Lord of the Wind.

The secret treasure obtained by its highest master - there is plenty of possibility it would refuse to be used by everyone else beside him.

Even in Ayano's case, if Juugo or Genma were to use Enraiha, there is a high possibility it would turn like that.

If something like that were to occur, she should go through a tedious ceremony identical with the inheritance one.

"So, what will you do?"

With a sidelong glance at the boy suffering a heartache, Ayano asked Kazuma.

"Will you take this opportunity to make the sacred treasure of the Wind yours?"

"—!!"

At those words that seemed to instigate robbery, the boy caught his breath sharply.

He set up Kokusen with open vigilance but the sacred treasure that turned into nothing more but a spear, has no power to drive Kazuma away.

"…You."

Ayano smiled with the feeling of a performer at Kazuma who grumbled at her reproachfully.

She was quite enjoyed.

With one lazy sigh, Kazuma stepped up to the boy. And then, he casually seized Kokusen.

"Le - let go!"

The boy pulled the spear towards himself with a desperate look. It seems that in the middle of the agitation, he even forgot to use Fujutsu.

Understandably, when it comes to physical strength - Kazuma was overwhelmingly superior.

The boy dropped his back and tried to cling to it rather than pull the spear but even so Kazuma's posture wasn't destroyed.

"No, no way…this is…only this…tch-"

"You're noisy. Just grasp it tightly then."

"—Eeh?"

The boy reflexively looked up at Kazuma. But, without paying attention to him, he gently closed his eyes.

And then -

"Wow…"

At the fantastic scene materializing right in front of her, Ayano let out a voice of wonder that couldn't be expressed into words.

The blue, sparkling wind coiled in a whirlpool before her eyes.

At times strong, at times tender, it was blowing through playfully as if dancing.

Fro somewhere, a transparent, refreshing sound could be heard.

Like a song, like a prayer, an exquisite echo permeated her ears.

"Are the Wind Spirits singing? No, it's not only that—"

One more <<*Voice*>> responding to the wind's song rose from the jet black spear held by both Kazuma ans the boy.

It was a strong multi-layered low tone. That sound, contrastive with the light and clear wind song melted into it wonderfully without feeling out of place.

Without one side pressing the other, a symbiotic relation matching each other mutually.

The tune spun as a result was the building up of a miraculous chord that could never be reproduced by musical instruments from the human world.

"He is…resonating with, Kokusen…"

Ayano involuntarily stared at Kazuma. It was clear that this miraculous scene was something done by the means of his power.

Probably right now, inside those closed eyelids, those pupils are shedding a blue light.

"Aah—"

While gazing at it intoxicated, suddenly the blue wind disappeared without any trailing note. At the same time Kazuma opened his eyes.

Those pupils already returned to usual color but even so, she thought she saw a bottomless brilliance dwelling into them - either way, it must have been her imagination.

On the other side, the boy was looking around the surroundings with an irrelevant face.

The contest of he spirits and the spear didn't seemed to bring any change to the surface but that was only reasonable.

But after a few seconds, opening his eyes wide, he looked at Kokusen.

"…Eeh? Aah…!"

On the surface nothing changed. But the people found there clearly grasped the change.

The spear that until now was nothing but a lump of metal recovered its overwhelming power.

That power of the spear itself wrapped the boy clasping it and formed one *field*.

Once more, the sacred treasure recognized the boy as it's master.

The boy, instantly expressing delight on his face, immediately glared at Kazuma stiffening.

"You…what did you do?"

As for Kazuma, he looked down at him with the smile of a mischievous boy.

"It's a secret."

"You!"

"What! If you're dissatisfied I can easily return it to the previous condition."

"—!!"

Panicking the boy hid Kokusen to his back. Of course, it wasn't something he could hide with his small build.

Ignoring the boy's reaction Kazuma said.

"For the time being, I'll invite you to Kannagi-san's house. There's a lot I want to ask of you — you also had business with her right?"

"—Aah"

After a short silence, carrying a strong will in his pupil, the boy nodded.

Chapter 3: At The Kannagi Residence

Part 1

After the present objective had been established, Ayano informed the boy.

"You can come to my house but first of all put that spear back. If you walk with it like that the police will start questioning us right away."

"…"

The boy reluctantly frowned and took out from his breast pocket an over-seized handkerchief like cloth.

Was it because the cloth was thin or because it was specially folded but it spread out in a bizarrely large way.

The boy enveloped Kokusen in it.

"What are you doing?"

"Hiding Kokusen, right?"

"Only that - I'm asking why aren't you storing it inside your body?"

"…"

The boy doesn't answer. He continued to envelop Kokusen in indifferent silence.

"…The Wind's sacred treasure, can't be put away just like Enraiha?" whispered Ayano in a small voice into Kazuma's ear.

"If it's so then it's so. There's no need for you to make such an unhappy face," answered Kazuma immediately.

It was just like that.

If you think about it more, the owner of the Water's sacred treasure also stored it inside his body. Then, it seems natural it would be the same for the Wind's also.

In other words, something the real owner could do this boy couldn't. That was —

"No way, you're not the official successor!?"

"Wrong!"

The boy replied immediately, decisively.

"Wrong! It's true that I'm not the official successor yet. But as a legitimate blood relative I have the qualification for succession! Don't put me together with a thief!"

At that time, Ayano remembered. This boy called that Chijutsushi Gaia *"his father's enemy"*.

It's likely that his father was urged to give the sacred treasure to those guys and when he refused he was killed.

And then, judging from the boy who was still very young but became the possessor of Kokusen without the due ritual of inheritance, it looked like all the family members older than him were killed.

"Aah— I'm sorry. I was pretty insensible."

Ayano frankly apologized. But, there was still one remaining problem.

"Then, how did you bring it here? You didn't pass through the airport's custom, right?"

"…I came by boat."

"No, that's still the same."

Whether it's by ship or by airplane, if one crosses the border by the regular routes, he will definitely meet the customs.

And, in Japan individuals weren't allowed to bring their own weapons.

Thinking that far, Ayano noticed the correct answer.

Holding weapons, she couldn't have come by a regular route. Then —

"You, you're an illegal immigrant right?"

"…There was no other way."

With a dissatisfied expression, the boy assented Ayano's question.

"I had to come to Japan at any cost. Because they're trying to gather all four sacred weapons."

The only one remaining one - the sacred treasure of Fire, Enraiha - was so famous there wasn't anyone in this business who didn't know it's name.

Together with the name of the family who owned it.

At a not very distant future, it was certain those two would contact Ayano.

In that situation, in order to make Ayano into his ally, the boy took the initiative and crossed the ocean without a moment's delay.

"—And then, you picked a fight with me?" Replied Ayano in an amazed voice, hearing the boy's explanation.

Even though there was a need to make sure of her ability, the method was confused.

If the timing were a bit different and he would have arrived after Chris and Gaia's, rather than friend

there was a high possibility he would have ended like an enemy.

But, the boy declared triumphantly.

"That's how the situation was. If one were to think about it calmly it can be understood the very best thing to do is a joint struggle."

"That so? Certainly I think it would be very advantageous for you to become our ally but — the reverse?"

"…"

Without answering, the boy bit his lips in regret.

That's right, from Kazuma and Ayano's standpoint, there's no advantage in becoming the boy's ally.

If they were simply trying to increase the war potential, it would more efficient to extort Kokusen from the boy and have Kazuma use it.

What's even more convenient, the boy challenged them on his accord. When it comes to the unwritten law of their world, having him beaten at his own game would be a splendid legitimate self defense.

"Do you understand? That you cannot complain if you were to be killed right here?"

"…"

"— How troublesome."

Looking at the boy who put himself on guard with unconcealed wariness, obstinately shutting his mouth, Ayano took a long breath.

She thought the boy's circumstance pitiful.

But, even though he was unfortunate, that does not mean he can bother other people and she has no reason to permit that happening here.

She doesn't have it but —

"Anyway."

Letting out another sigh, Ayano dodged the issue. Looking towards the boy over her shoulder, she informed him shortly.

"First, let's return to the house. I'll hear the detailed account after."

"—Is it alright?"

Perceiving that criticism disappeared from Ayano's eyes, the boy turned his face to her puzzled.

"I don't like finishing off people who are cornered. But this guy does it without batting an eyelid —"

And then, fleetingly looking at Kazuma, Ayano asked.

"Do you want that spear?"

"Don't want it," retorted Kazuma extremely concisely.

"…"

The boy made a complicated face. Despite feeling relived at not having Kokusen snatched away, his dissatisfaction at having it cast away as if it was something worthless was insuppressible.

Ayano too, thought it was strange so she asked him again.

"But, why? Isn't it natural to want that if you're a Fujutsushi?"

"I could use it but it would come together with various troubles. It probably has the grudge of the Fuan family."

"—Well, that may be so."

"…"

Looking at Ayano immediately nodding, the boy made a complicated face once more.

"Besides, when it comes to this kind of items, it would be very hard to sell it since it's so famous."

'**"You'd sell it!?"**'

Perfectly synchronized, Ayano and the boy retorted at the same time.

Kazuma shrugged his shoulders superficially.

“Well, leaving jokes aside.”

“Liar. You were definitely serious.”

“I said leaving jokes aside.”

In a manner as if he couldn’t hear the voice of objection, he forcefully changed the subject.

“We should quickly go. It’s pointless staying and talking here.”

“……I agree”

Even though she had a lot - a great lot she wanted to say, Ayano agreed at once.

Part 2

"Is the Suzerain home?"

Kazuma began cross-examining the first servant he happened to see after walking in the Kannagi Residence.

Against people who have something to do with the Kannagi, Kazuma attitude is basically bad.

Even though he doesn't put on airs of superiority, at any rate all his interactions are impolite, which gained him an equally bad reputation among people in all kind of positions.

In Ayano's eyes it seemed like he purposefully wanted others to hate him. Even though she didn't understand the reason.

But even so, as one would expect from a pro - the servant naturally didn't let any of the dissatisfaction she felt shown on her face and replied matter-of-fact.

"Yes. But, right now Shin'ichirou-sama is visiting."

"Shin'ichirou?"

Since that name was very unexpected, Kazuma quizzically asked again.

And then, he tilted his head in confusion, next he looked at the ceiling and finally, turning to Ayano, he asked frankly.

"Who is that?"

Unintentional, Ayano was greatly perplexed.

"The head of the Yuuki Family. Remember at least that much."

"Don't be absurd. That kind of guy played such a minor role, it's impossible to remain in my memory," said Kazuma calmly over his shoulder, looking around as if searching for something.

And then -

"This way, huh?"

He started walking towards the Suzerain's Kehai he just located.

The servant followed him in a fluster.

"Pl- please wait! We were instructed to not let anyone approach—"

But Kazuma didn't turned around.

And then, she begged Ayano's assistance but she couldn't rely on her either.

"Sorry. But our issue is without mistake more important so I don't think he'll get mad. Aah, take care of the tea. You know the number, right?"

Saying so, she followed after Kazuma. And lastly, even the boy who visited the house for the first time.

"Ayano-samaaa…" groaned the yet young servant girl as if crying, the only one who remained behind.

"Suzerain, are you in?"

"—Kazuma?"

The moment that voice could be heard from indoors, Kazuma opened the futsuma without asking for permission.

He stepped in just like that and the two men who were sitting down - the Suzerain of the Kannagi Family - Juugo and the head of Yuuki Family, one of the branch families, Shin'ichirou, were looking to him seeming surprised.

"Kazuma-dono, isn't this somewhat impolite?"

Shin'ichirou knitted his brows in criticism but Kazuma completely ignored him.

Looking only at Juugo, he said.

"We have to talk."

"—Hmm, is it urgent?"

"I should thing so. More urgent than this."

And then, for the first time, Kazuma looked at Shin'ichirou.

Without even showing scorn to the man looking at him with a gaze full of hatred, he said plainly.

"Get out."

"Wha—!"

Shin'ichirou trembled with anger.

From the beginning this man, resenting Kazuma for loosing two sons, he had an especially great antipathy towards him even amongst the branch families.

But, because his ability was no match for his, wanting a reprimand instead, he turned a gaze of supplication towards Juugo but —

"Shin'ichirou, I'm sorry but step outside."

"Wha…Suzerain!?"

The returning answer was heartless.

"Kazuma has something he wants to say enough to visit this house. It can't be a common conversation. Right?"

"It's important for you. For me it doesn't really matter. In whose hand will Enraiha fall?"

At that question lightly investigating, Kazuma replied completely indifferent.

But from that last hint, it was certainly something they, as a family, couldn't ignore.

"Shin'ichirou."

"—Yeah."

As expected, Shin'ichirou didn't complain this time and obediently left.

And yet, when passing each other, he didn't forgot to give Kazuma a gaze full of hatred.

Passing each other the three people entered the room. And then, Ayano prepared the zabuton (floor cushion) — she removed the one Shin'ichirou used and they sat down.

"Well then—"

Juugo looked in order at the trio and lastly at the unknown boy, sharply gazing at the object he was holding in his hand.

"Before talking, the introduction of the guest comes first. Is the content of that bundle you're holding a spear? I can feel a tremendous power from it."

"That is correct. Incidentally, its name is Kokusen," declared Kazuma in a light tone.

And then naturally, different from his daughter, he father knew that name. He looked at the boy with a surprised expression.

"What! Then he's from the Fuan Family?"

"Aah, that's right. He's—"

Stopping in mid-sentence, Kazuma stared at the boy fixedly.

"By the way, we still haven't heard your name. Do you wish to remain anonymous?"

Knitting his eyebrows in disapproval at Kazuma, who was persistently frivolous, the boy faced Juugo.

"…I am called Fuan Xiaolei."

And then, after showing a small hesitation, he bowed and gave his name.

As for Juugo, he returned the nod.

"I am the Suzerain of the Kannagi Family, Kannagi Juugo. Should I tell you welcome? It does not seen you came for sightseeing but we welcome you in our family."

"—Thank you very much."

Looking very relived, the boy - Xiaolei bowed once more.

But then, Kazuma suddenly poking his nose in other's affair, he asked rudely.

"By the way you, what reason do you have not to give your real name?"

Xiaolei's shoulders trembled a little. All eyes gathered there, but he didn't reply.

Instead, Ayano asked of Kazuma.

"Why did you know it wasn't his real name? Do you know the name of this boy?"

The Fuan Family in the most famous Fujutsushi lineage worldwide. She thought that because Kazuma was a Fujutsushi too he would be well-informed about this family but —

"No, I don't. But, no matter how much your father joked around, he wouldn't name you Xiaolei - you should have a girl's name, right?" **(!)**

"Haa…"

Not knowing why but having a feeling a very odd thing was said, Ayano alternately looked at Kazuma and <<the boy>>.

"—Girl?"

One isolated word came from her mouth. That single word made Xiaolei's shoulders tremble very bad this time.

It was a reaction similar to a resolute affirmation.

Ayano and Juugo, as expected, looked at Xiaolei with plain shock and shouted with force:

"A - A girl!?"

"…"

Xiaolei was silent. But, without negating Ayano's words, that behavior of not making eye contact was a more eloquent answer than anything else.

"How did you know?"

Kazuma quickly answered.

"I felt it when I trampled her down."

Having said that, Ayano remembered. After utterly defeating Xiaolei, Kazuma trampled that chest down with so much force as if trying to skewer it and sew it to the ground.

Certainly it was on top of her clothes and it was something he felt through his shoe but it was impossible he didn't notice he trampled a woman's chest.

"Wait a minute!"

But at the time she thought so far, Ayano reflexively shouted.

"Then, does that mean you used so much force on a woman's breasts and continued trampling them even after noticing!?"

"What of it?" Said Kazuma, without even a fragment of guilt.

"Wah, you're the lowest!"

"It's my rule not to discriminate between sexes. Besides, if I were to go easy on someone because she's a woman, that would be impolite to the other party."

"Well, that may be true but…"

While mumbling Ayano peeked once more at his - her silhouette.

She appeared younger than her but even keeping that in mind, her body was rough and lacking.

Looking at that particularly small chest, Ayano asked full of consideration.

"Are you wearing cotton stripes over that chest? Isn't it painful?"

The girl's face was jolted faintly. But, without noticing that Ayano continued with genuine good will.

"I don't know with what intention you pretend to be a boy but pressing them too hard it's not healthy and the form will be ruined."

"…Up."

"Eeh? What?"

Lending her ear to hear the girl's whisper, Ayano brought her face near.

And then, with a crimson face, her mouth tear-choked, the girl's angry roar exploded.

"Shut up! I'm sorry for being small! Even yours, it's not like they're so big you can boast about it!"

"—"

Forgetting how to respond to the sudden and unforeseen anger, Ayano stared at the girl in wonder.

But, she was also, tentatively, a woman. She instantly understood Xiaolei's feelings.

"Errr, well — I'm sorry. Aah, but, your growing period is not over yet so I don't think you need to be so pessimistic."

"…"

Ayano followed up while becoming confused. But Xiaolei glanced at that chest who was in itself above

average with a spiteful expression and then turned away.

Kazuma shook his head seeming very sarcastic.

"Aa—aah, how pitiful. There are times when insensible words can hurt much more so than the spiteful ones."

"That's not something you can say to me! You ground your foot against this girl's chest! What will you do if her growth stops because of you!?" Shouted Ayano in response.

Even though she talked on and on with force and the words were a stretch, at those words Xiaolei pressed her chest as if feeling anxious.

It seems like she had a pretty serious complex.

"Aah, no, I'm sure it will be fine. If you eat enough and exercise, your chest will get bigger involuntarily."

"That's right, if it's necessary there's also breast augmentation."

"You shut up!"

Ayano shouted with all her strength at Kazuma who was saying too many unnecessary things.

But even so she didn't notice that her own conversation strained to far from the subject they came here to talk about.

Wanting to put the conversation on track, Juugo was about to open his mouth but,

"Please excuse me…"

Slightly preceding it, a shy voice forced its way through from the other side of the futsuma.

"Tea is served."

"—Enter."

Looking at the tray with four tea cups, Juugo understood the general situation.

But the servant, misunderstanding that gaze for one of reprimand, started to explain in a confused manner.

"Aa, errr, I, I was appointed by Ayano-sama…I also informed them about Shin'ichirou…"

"No, it's fine. There's no one else in this house who can stop her except for me or Genma."

"Wait, Otou-sama!? Don't refer to me like you would to a violent horse!"

"Isn't it just like that? Good grief, how did I brought up such a beyond wild girl…this is so troublesome."

"That's so true."

Keeping in tune with the lamenting Juugo, Kazuma agreed. Ayano scowled with a much sterner look but those two didn't pay attention to it.

"Aah, well, I'm sorry for disturbing you."

Unable to bear that blood thirsty ambiance, the servant quickly distributed the tea and withdrew.

From the way she looked she wouldn't approach anymore without being called or ordered.

"Well then, let's return to the real issue."

At that chance, getting a fresh start as if nothing happened, Kazuma fleetingly looked at Xiaolei's face.

"I don't really object against you using a fake name. It's fine even if you don't want to say the reason. Your name here is Fuan Xiaolei — is that all right?"

"Yeah. I am Fuan Xiaolei. I gave up being a woman. Because to kill them and take revenge for my family I don't need to be a woman!" Declared the girl with a voice carrying a determined will.

Aroused by the dark, powerful sentiment called *revenge*, she naturally decided to overlook her own body.

The spirit that brought that about was probably enough to make ordinary humans overwhelmed. But —

"—Haa."

Kazuma snorted at that.

"What's so funny?"

"You mean, in addition to your stupidity?"

"You- you bastard!"

Xiaolei stood up in anger glaring at Kazuma.

But, sitting cross-legged and smiling faintly Kazuma caught that glare without wincing.

"Look,"

He casually pointed at Ayano.

"This is a woman. You can understand that by looking?"

Of course. Her outward appearance was that of a spotless beautiful girl. Mistaking her for a boy would mean problems to the brain rather than the eyes.

"—So?"

"So, do you remember her movements a while ago?"

"…"

Nearby the perplexed Xiaolei, sensing that Kazuma was about to say something worthless again, Ayano's facial expression became grim.

Without minding, Kazuma continued.

"There is such a brave, manly, more handsome-than-any-man woman! There's no need to especially throw away being a woman, when you look at her you realize that right?"

"You're noisy!"

Ayano shouted spontaneously, seized the teacup and threw it at him.

But, with a small sway back, Kazuma easily avoided that.

The teacup went straight ahead, broke through the futsuma and disappeared in the hallway - *gogun, smash* - two kinds of sounds resounded.

It seems that it sunk into the opposing wall and then smashed with all its strength.

A period of several seconds of silence that made one want to run away filled the room.

"—Ayano."

What destroyed it was Juugo's voice.

It was low and calm but, that deep anger that could be felt from that tone of voice made Ayano's face stiffen.

"Y- yes…"

Staring very long at his daughter who replied in a vanishing voice, Juugo said in a sorrowful voice.

"It's because you only do stuff like this that you're being called crude and brutal."

"No, going that far…this time it was brave and manly."

"Ayano."

"Yees, I'll reflect on this."

At Juugo's even more weighty word, Ayano gave up any protest prostrating herself before him.

Juugo made one small but heavy sigh. And then, to Kazuma -

"Don't mind her."

"No? Well, it's true she's troublesome at times but it's basically enjoyable."

"…"

Ayano was excited by Kazuma's words once more but this time she put up with it. Which means, she didn't have anything close at hand to throw at him.

Postponing disciplining his daughter for now, Juugo attempted to restore the story.

"By the way, Kazuma."

"Huh?"

"Will you continue?"

Thereupon, Kazuma tilted his head to the side in wonder and said.

"Eeh, why? That was the real punch line."

"Don't do that!"

Juugo ignored his daughter's retort and looked at Kazuma but, he only returned the brad grin of a bad man and didn't look like he would get straight to the point.

Reluctantly, he addressed Xiaolei.

"Xiaolei-kun — can I call you that?"

"…What is it?"

"I'm not one who is qualified to say whether your choice is right or wrong. So, I only want you to listen to this opinion."

Not trying to correct her mistake from a higher place but to undo the prejudice of insisting on one answer.

"Men and women are different. Different from the question of which is superior, their muscles, built, internal organs, they all vary between men and women."

"…"

"Therefore, even if they have the same purpose, the optimum way for a man to accomplish that is definitely different from the way a woman would do it. I will not comment on your views of looking on women as *weaklings* but even if you want to throw away the *weak*

woman and pretend to be a *strong* man, that is after all nothing but imitating a man. “

Xiaolei cast down her eyes, tightly grasping her fists placed on top of her knees.

In truth, even in the prior battle when she discarded being a woman, she was defeated easily by Gaia.

“Not limited to battle technique, every single path starts from accepting yourself as you are. The way you are right now is a *strong* man that cannot win against an accomplished woman.”

“—For example, someone like your daughter?”

“Huh?”

At the sudden retort, Juugo’s eyebrows faintly flip-up, and looked at Ayano sitting straight in front of him.

With a light snicker he shook his head.

“No, my daughter is in truth a cause of annoyance. Even though being honest sounds good, if she doesn’t put her reason to work even a little, that’s no different from a beast…”

“Will you go that far, Otou-sama!?”

“What, if you have an objection please say it.”

With a cold retort to the daughter shouting at the severe criticism, Juugo shifted his attention to the entrance of the room.

The circular hole opened in the futsuma gave his words persuasive power beyond consent or refusal.

"Auuu…"

With a glance at Ayano moaning at a loss of words, Juugo turned round to Xiaolei.

"Anyhow, such readiness is meaningless if it's not established by yourself. The relative strength obtained when compared to other people's won't become the pillar necessary to support yourself."

"…!!"

Feeling like she was pointed out for depending on others, Xiaolei blushed.

Because she didn't want to feel like she made a mistake, she compared herself with Ayano.

Meaning that your daughter, in which you have such an exaggerated confidence, after all, she couldn't win against me.

But, that was a simple faultfinding in desperation, equivalent to an unfair false accusation.

Juugo's words can't be undermined by that degree of sophistry.

"Certainly, my words are lip service. It can be possible to throw away your weakness and only strength to remain.

If one were to scrape off the weakness, the unnecessary, what remains will inevitably be strength. Just like a sharpened blade.

But, isn't that just like the strength of a machine? For me, I don't want such a young man like you to throw away weakness and become strong but to overcome your weakness aiming for strength.

Well, that is nothing more but my selfishness."

Simply but with such virtue and authority one felt compelled to straighten in his seat, Juugo concluded his words.

"Even I understand that your decision is certainly not a light one. It's impossible to change your mind just because someone advised you at the first meeting.

But, think about it well. What is the best course you should follow?"

"— I thank you for your advice."

After a small pause, Xiaolei finally said that much.

But, her determination didn't change.

If it's to carry out her revenge, she would throw away everything that gets in the way, including her nature.

But.

"I'll think about it."

Juugo's words gave Xiaolei the impression she was endowed with the weight regarding various - really things.

"Hmm."

Seeing through the change in the girl's heart, Juugo nodded satisfied. And then, he changed his gaze to Kazuma.

"I think this is pretty much what you wanted to say but — do you have anything else to add?"

"—Huh? What are you talking about?"

Kazuma played dumb, smiling frivolously. Ayano and Xiaolei stared coldly at that slack face.

"Otou-sama, I do believe you're overestimating Kazuma. It's impossible for this guy to think that deeply. After all, his only objective was to entertain himself, isn't that obvious?"

Xiaolei too, supported Ayano in this. No natter what Juugo's words were, she could not believe this superficial man could think that deeply.

Faced with Ayano and Xiaolei's distrustful gaze, he didn't say anything to those two but only expressed a bitter smile.

And then, Juugo began asking a question entirely disregarding the flow until now.

"And now, I think it's finally time to get straight to the point — What happened?" He asked, evenly looking around at the trio.

But, that gaze was quickly placed on one person and did not move.

The remaining two stared in silence at the last person - Xiaolei.

That was only natural. As for the strife this time, Kazuma and Ayano were in a defensive situation from the beginning to the end.

Because they practically knew nothing about the circumstance, there's nothing to explain.

From what they can conjecture from the fragmentary information, the <<enemy>> is aiming at Enraiha and Kokusen.

And then, besides that, it seems that the Fuan family the girl calling herself Xiaolei left behind was destroyed.

Showered with the gaze of everyone present, Xiaolei's facial expression tightened. And then, she began to speak of the original opening.

"It happened three days ago. Two men appeared in front of my father. Calling themselves Christian Roengram and Gaia, and the possessors of the Water's and Earth's sacred treasures, they were strong Jutsushi."

"—Huh? The sacred treasures of Water and Earth, you said?" Murmured Juugo, interested.

"Did you know, Kazuma?"

"No, I heard it for the first time today," replied Kazuma immediately.

Practically, different from magic tools that had a simple water or earth attribute, even he had limited information about existences endowed with the status <<sacred weapons>> that can rival Enraiha or Kokusen.

"Father said the same thing. That there are no sacred weapons the Spirit Lord blessed us with except Enraiha of the Fire and Kokusen of the Wind. But, they

definitely posses a level of power that won't bring shame to the name of sacred weapon. And then, they demanded my father's cooperation as the successor of Kokusen."

"Cooperation?"

"Yes. The Water and Earth they had, and then the Wind father had and the Fire of the Kannagi — they said they would gather the four sacred treasure given by the Spirit Lords and then hold a grand scale magic ceremony."

"A magic ceremony by collecting the four sacred treasures—?"

Ayano asked of her father, inclining her head.

"If they can gather four sacred treasures, will they be able to do something special?"

"—No, I didn't hear that kind of story. Besides, I haven't heard about the existence of the Water and Earth sacred treasures so it's only to be expected."

With that introduction, Juugo announced hid deduction without cracking a smile.

"But, all phenomena of this world are made of the four elements. If one could freely manipulate all of

that through the sacred treasures, there would be probably very little one could not do."

It is nothing more but a legend, a story at the fairy-tale level that says this world was created by the Spirit Lords of the four elements.

If that is true, and the sacred treasures are the proof of the authority borrowed from the Spirit Lords, there would be nothing they couldn't do.

It's an extreme argument but there is the possibility of even rebuilding the world.

But, without taken away by the magnificence of the story, Kazuma objected extremely calm.

"Theoretically speaking, that is. But something like that is impossible in reality."

"Why?"

"At a different level from when you simply mix water and wind and get mist, or fire and earth and get magma, for something more, for example the creation of a phenomenon at a natural calamity scale if you want to control it, a strict tuning is necessary. But, the Jutsu control for Spirit Jutsushi is considerably intuitive."

Different from other types of magic, the Spirit Jutsu attaches more importance to sensitivity rather that reason.

Therefore, group work is excessively difficult — even in a practical situation that is considerably intuitive, theorizing it, converting it numerically, it's practically impossible to reproduce it.

"You, if I were to tell you to mix a 36% fire with a 64% earth, would you be able to coordinate with a Chijutsushi?"

"…Uu, that's…"

"For argument's sake if we were to say you could do it, then, what is the unit? The number of spirits? Calories? Or Mass? How do you establish a common unit for four types of Spirits?"

No one was able to respond to those questions fired in rapid succession.

And, in this place there were direct descendants from the Fuan and Kannagi families - each controlling the top Spirit Jutsushi.

If they did not know about it, it was absolutely certain such a standard did not exist.

"This kind of information we have no idea about means constructing a technique system from scratch, even more, acquiring Jutsushi who can use the sacred treasure and then finally trying it out in practice - that's the kind of level we speak about. To complete this how many years — no, I don't know how many generations it will take."

"But then, there's also the possibility it was secretly developed from way back and they began moving as it was completed, right?"

"Don't imagine such bad things, you. But, if that's true —"

"What?"

"If that's the care, there is a mastermind behind them."

"…Uuu."

Ayano groaned at the even more serious pointing out. But, if she were to think of Chris and Gaia's speech and conduct, she could agree to that story.

"Certainly, they don't seem the kind of people who could have such a grand plan and accomplish it…"

"Right? What's even more, the idea itself of using and experimenting on Spirits does not belong with a Spirit Jutsushi."

For Spirit Jutsushi, the Spirits are not just simple weapons or tools. They are irreplaceable colleagues and partners.

Any honest Spirit Jutsushi wouldn't think of them as a material for experiments.

It was the same thing as testing something on family or close friends.

"…How to say this, I have a more and more bad feeling about this."

"Yeah. — Aah, by the way."

Remembering he had something he should confirm before thinking about this, Kazuma shifted his attention to Xiaolei.

"Did you hear something about what kind of ceremony they are planning on holding?"

Xiaolei shook her head a little.

"Father may have heard about it but I didn't…In any case, father turned them down. At the time they obediently withdrew but the next day…"

Her fists grasped tightly, shook. When reminiscing about the memory of those times, her pupils were pregnant with anger, terror and hatred.

"My father, my brothers…even Okaa-sama…"

Without continuing further, Xiaolei kept her mouth shut. Not only her first but even her body shook with exhaustion.

The spirits responded to that fitful anger and a wind blew violently inside the room — but it quickly died down.

Juugo and Ayano glanced at Kazuma but quickly turned their eyes to Xiaolei. But, as expected, she did not continue. It was an understandable evolution.

"— So, the story after that."

Instead of Xiaolei who was silent, Ayano volunteered to explain.

"A short time ago those two came to pick a fight with us. Saying to hand Enraiha over. We beat them up however."

"*However* — you let them escape. Isn't that right?"

As if pouring cold water on the head of his elated daughter, that was Juugo.

The humiliated Ayano glared at Kazuma with a resentful stare.

"If Kazuma were serious, the future problem should have been disposed of."

"—Hou?"

But, without showing disturbance at the two's coercion, Kazuma turned the usual slack smile to Juugo.

"Well, that's how it is — Kokusen and Enraiha are being aimed at — this is serious, Suzerain."

And so he declared without tension, like it was completely someone else's problem.

Critical glared gathered at the excessively superficial attitude, but even so, without any kind of seriousness blended in it —

"Well then — do your best!"

Together with those irresponsible words of encouragement, he left his seat as if declaring his noninterference.

"…Wait Kazuma."

But Juugo promptly called Kazuma to a halt.

"I want to hire you until this case is over. Your top priority is protecting Ayano and Enraiha, the next is the elimination of the enemy. Is that alright? "

"It's going to be expensive."

"I don't care."

In a good tempo, those two concluded the agreement.

For Ayano that was *the usual* so it didn't bother her it but for Xiaolei that wasn't the case.

Believing Kazuma's attitude excessively indiscreet, she couldn't endure it and cut in the conversation.

"Wait a minute! You, do you understand the situation right now?"

"I think so?"

"Then why are you talking about something like remuneration? Now it's not the time to mind such things, don't you agree?"

Xiaolei was enraged.

But, contrastive to her, Kazuma faced the girl with a thoroughly indifferent countenance.

"Such things, huh? As expected of an Ojou-sama from the Fuan family."

"Wha…what do you mean?"

"Well then, let's continue."

Disregarding Xiaolei pressing a question, Kazuma reopened the negotiation with Juugo.

"Oi!"

"—Let it go."

Ayano restrained the girl who even so was about to press for an answer with a voice full of sympathy.

"That's how this guy is. If you mind it you loose."

"But—"

Xiaolei couldn't consent no matter what.

She understood it so much it felt painful. That's because that was the road she once traveled on.

That's why, for that reason, she must learn no matter what.

— In society, there are times you can make a fool of yourself by taking too seriously the existence of the reality you cannot be saved from.

"Understand that."

"…"

As if she saw something in that facial expression that was more eloquent than words, Xiaolei shut her mouth.

But even so the gaze she turned to Kazuma was overflowing with scorn , still he didn't display the slightest reaction and continued his negotiation with Juugo.

"By the way, how capable were they?"

"There wasn't a lot of time but at best, they are merely first-class. As long as they don't have some huge hidden trick, they're at a level me and Ayano can deal with."

"Humph — But, an incident is an incident. Should I call back Genma and Ren?"

"They're not here?"

"They're on a business trip. They went to Tohoku."

"Unlucky — well, do as you want."

Negligently saying so over his shoulder, Kazuma stood up once more.

This time without pause, he was seriously wanting to leave. But -

"— Wait."

Xiaolei's voice stopped those legs.

Kazuma turned only his head.

"What?"

"There's still something I need to ask you no matter what."

Gazing at Kazuma with hard eyes as if she were in front of the enemy, Xiaolei fired the question.

"You, who are you?"

"Who, you ask?"

Worn out by that insecure posture, Kazuma changed the orientation of his body leaning against a pillar and caught Xiaolei's gaze.

"My name is Yagami Kazuma. A freelance Fujutsushi. My favorite work is the danger-less ghost extermination, my goal is an uneventful life but that became non-existent since my main activity became the protection of the Kannagi Family's Ojou-san — well, that's about it."

More than terribly sketchy, he left out the most important data but, in outline that was truthful profile.

"Don't mess around!"

With bare anger Xiaolei shouted.

"It's impossible to find a stronger Fujutsushi than me, a direct descendant of the Fuan family, in the streets! Answer! You, from where are you?"

Xiaolei was exasperated.

Contrastingly, Kazuma sneered persistently composed.

"You have considerable faith in yourself, huh?" He declared severely.

Meaning that while she continued loosing to Chris, Gaia and himself, she still posed as a <<warrior>>.

"—!!"

Accurately understanding the meaning of those words, Xiaolei's face colored with anger and disgrace.

But for her, a direct descendant of the Fuan family nominated as the strongest Fujutsushi, Kazuma was a being that threatened the meaning of their existence.

She won't be easily deceived.

Adjusting her breathing and calming her heart, she doubled the spirit driven at Kazuma.

"Certainly, it's not unusual for someone to be stronger than me. But, didn't you control the mist much more than that Suijutsushi? Something like mist is in the water domain with a roughly seven or eight ratio at least. To have a stronger control that a Suijutsushi holding a sacred weapon, something like that cannot be achieved by an ordinary Fujutsushi. How do you explain that?"

"How, you ask?"

Even faced with Xiaolei's identification confident she touched a vital point, Kazuma didn't lost his composure for a moment.

He declared, carelessly shrugging his shoulders.

"As a Fujutsushi I have no connection with any lineage. I appeared out of thin air."

"That's impossible."

"If you want to fuss over lineage so much I*ll tell you that I am a direct descendant of Kannagi."*

"What?"

At that excessively unexpected answer, after a few seconds, in mute amazement, Xiaolei gazed inquiringly at Juugo and Ayano.

Both nodded at the same time.

"It's the truth. Because of different circumstances he claims to have a different name."

"…"

Xiaolei looked at Kazuma once more. On her face there was shock that couldn't be concealed.

At any rate, more than her - no, the blood-line of the most powerful Fujutsushi she ever saw, is the direct descendant of the Kannagi Family — the highest Enjutsushi authority.

"Why in the world —"

"You want to ask the reason? Even I don't know that," said Kazuma lightly over his shoulder.

And then, he vaguely added.

"Well, it must be that. No matter how famous the clan is, the founder was nothing but a person of doubtful origin. It means that this kind of mutation can appear."

His tone was vapid tone but the language pretty abusive.

This time he left without turning back.

Chapter 4: The Way An Avenger Ought To Be

Part 1

In one of the private rooms of a Chinese restaurant located close to the Metropolitan Police Department, Kazuma was explaining the details of the story to Tachibana Kirika.

"…what did you say? ", asked Kirika dumbfounded, staring at him in wonder, but without replying Kazuma gulped down his mapo doufu.

He eliminated the pointless time of surprised cross-examinations, understanding she actually heard what he said but couldn't comprehend it.

Besides when Chinese food becomes cool it becomes unappetizing.

"—Kazuma, wait"

Quickly regaining her serenity, Kirika glared at Kazuma with a blank stare.

"Right now, we're talking about something unthinkably important. Can't you be a little more honest? "

"Not really, no matter what attitude I take the situation won't change. "

But even so, Kazuma didn't rest his chopsticks. On the contrary, he asked Kirika.

"You're not eating? "

"…I lost my appetite", groaned Kirika in a dejected tone.

But, she couldn't do that.

If Kazuma's words were true — and she absolutely couldn't believe this man would lie at such a time — the battle that will start before long might bring damage at a disaster scale to Tokyo.

"But even so, I've never even heard rumors regarding the existence of sacred treasures from Water and earth."

"Right. Even I didn't know. The Suzerain didn't either. "

"Isn't that weird? "

Kirika knitted her eyebrows in doubt.

"I don't know when and how this world came to be but if something like that were to exist in reality, do you think it's likely not even a bit on information would leak out? "

"Who knows"

That was a justified question but Kazuma's response had no enthusiasm.

"It doesn't really matter. I have no interest in stories of the past. "

"Not like that —"

With an earnest facial expression that doesn't allow a negligent attitude, Kirika pressed for a answer.

"What I'm trying to say is, weren't the sacred treasures of Water and Earth just bestowed by the Spirit Lord? "

In other words, that Chris and Gaia were the same with the Founder of Kannagi and the same with Kazuma.

"I wonder…"

Remembering those two's ability, Kazuma murmured in a contradictory voice.

They were certainly first-class Jutsushi.

Chris was an excellent Suijutsushi, even Gaia, if Kazuma wouldn't have used Kokusen, he wouldn't have been able to repel him so simply.

But.

That was true and yet —

"I don't think they were such significant masters. "

Even if Kazuma were empty-handed, he did not think he'd loose to Gaia.

It would be a close fight. He would maybe even suffer wounds.

But even so, the empty-handed himself will without fail win in the end against Gaia owning a sacred treasure. He could assert that.

"Huh, if you say it by your standard…"

Retorting with a stunned expression to Kazuma who declared so without hesitation, Kirika noticed her own misunderstanding.

"I see…that's right. It must be by your standard"

If the sacred weapons were newly acquired, it meant signing a contract with the Spirit Lord.

Then, if the person cannot stand in the same arena with Kazuma, who is a <<Contractor>>, it means it doesn't have that qualification.

But, if so, they were an even more suspicious lot.

"As for Suijutsushi families, I never heard of a Roengram. And then Gaia — the Earth? the Chijutsushi who doesn't give his surname, even more, the fact

that he's using an flagrant alias, that seems very questionable. "

The Spirit Jutsushi, almost without exception stressed their family name.

Because they are a class where inborn ability is more important than anything else, that could be called the natural current.

Even for the <<first generation>> that acquired power unrelated to lineage, the trend is constant.

Rather, for the sake of making a reputation, there are many who emphasize the surname even more.

To sum it up, a Spirit Jutsushi who doesn't name himself is someone who was either banished from the family or someone who has done a serious crime, anyway, someone for whom giving his name would produce inconvenience, nothing but a dishonest Jutsushi.

For those kind of people, it's impossible that they are the due successors of secret treasures.

"It's not only that"

To perform a magic ceremony by gathering the sacred treasure of the four elements, that's fine so far. But —

"At the time of the Fuan Family they used force because the negotiations failed and yet when it comes to Ayano-chan they attacked suddenly, right? Just what were they thinking? "

"At first, they began in a negotiation-like fashion, though "

"Don't make fun of this. You understand, right? "

Kirika didn't respond to Kazuma's joke but coldly replied.

What Kazuma meant by negotiations was what Chris said: *"If you obediently hand over Enraiha I won't hurt you"*.

Even if they tried negotiating with the Fuan family one way or another, the change in attitude was too big.

Or perhaps, because there was no way to consider those negotiations it looked like some kind of proclamation of war.

"They wanted to turn the Fuan into their allies but when it comes to Kannagi they planned to be hostile since the beginning? If it were me I would try my best not to make enemies of the Kannagi only — do you think they have some kind of grudge? "

"Who knows? While you're searching for them, if you feel so inclined, investigate it. "

At Kazuma trying to push something even more troublesome on her, Kirika turned to him a glare full of blame.

"Hey, it's not like I have that much spare time. Even if you request an investigation from me, we still don't have a prospect"

"This and that are different. This is for the Special Information Storage Room and it's an issue of maximum priority. "

It was a fair argument. This man, when it's advantageous for him, won't hesitate to do some whitewashing.

"Besides, it's not like there isn't any compensation. If you find their whereabouts before they start to move, the Kannagi will owe you big time. That's sweet. "

"—That's if we can find them. "

"Well, anyhow, do your best"

"You too. "

At that reply, Kazuma, who said so over his shoulder like it was someone else's problem, frowned involuntarily.

"Why do I have to be involved in such a troublesome thing no matter what? I was supposed to have a little income by exorcising ghosts with one hand and spend my life in tranquility and peace "

"You're such a…", sighed Kirika astonished at Kazuma's lower middle class-like ambition, excessively unconscious of his own position.

"You can state that as much as you want but it's impossible. No matter how you think about it, you were born under the star of upheaval. "

"What a thing to say. How rude. "

Asking so with a tone of forced resentment, Kazuma left his seat.

"In any case, I count on you. More that the fact that the Suzerain requested it, you don't have the choice to stay out of it. "

While concealing his the feelings on facial expression by casting his eyes down, his lips raised as if smiling.

From those lips, a voice so flat it could give one shudders came out.

“Because right now it’s not the time to do that. “

“…”

While Kirika didn’t say anything, Kazuma left the room.

Left alone, she continued to stare at the door Kazuma left through for a very long time with a pained gaze.

Suddenly her eyes dropped on the table.

With more than half left, vapor frequently rose from the cooking.

But, no matter how vibrant the colors looked, how delicious the smell was, the appetite that was totally eradicated could not be revived.

“Speaking like you’re not caught up in this is forced, you know…”

She remembered. That one moment his mask failed and his honest face peaking from underneath.

So empty it made her shudder, so ghastly and sorrowful beyond comparison — that kind of face.

“I really…entrust this to you, Ayano-chan”

Part 2

Dream

That was, a dream.

"Otou-sama, Okaa-sama, I was able to do Senga Kyuren (trad. Nine Verse Pierce Fang) !"

The time when she was an innocent girl, when she didn't know anything and not knowing was permitted.

"Ooh, well done << >>! You have maybe more talent than my sons, no? "

The strong, gentle father.

"You did your best << >>. But you are a girl so you must learn to be more couteous, right? "

The beautiful mother.

And then, although competing with each other for the Successor position, the brothers with a close relationship.

A happy, perfect world.

Satisfied in just about everything, with nothing to complain about, the passing of day after day, all peaceful —

But, that was a dream.

The memory of very, very distant paradise she was parted with—

"Haaah! "

As if trying to shake off the past, Xiaolei earnestly swung Kokusen in the uninhabited dojo.

She had no time to yearn for memories, all that was left to her was her body, Kokusen entrusted to her by her father and —

"Without exception, I will take revenge! "

Only that thought, in was similar with obsession.

She needed power. Above all else. — No matter what she must sacrifice to get it.

Juugo said to rather overcome weakness rather than simply discard it. But, she does not have time enough to do that.

No matter how you gloss it over, women are <<weak>> things. When it comes to their motion ability, they are inferior to men.

She could not recognize that weakness, accept it and then overcome it.

She just lost everything.

Without even that scrap of power she has, she would be degraded to a powerless girl.

Right now she wanted a more reliable strength than that idealistic thought. She didn't care about anything else.

She understood what Juugo was trying to say.

The blade that was pointlessly chipped off, instead of obtaining the utmost firmness and sharpness, will loose its tenacity and become brittle.

But she was fine with that.

Foe example, if she were smashed in just one swing, if she could cut the enemy's life at the same time , she'll count it as a win.

"I'll definitely kill — to make my father's, my mother's, my brothers' regret disappear, with this hand! "

Thinking only such heartbreaking thoughts, Xiaolei continued to wield the spear.

More faster, more sharper, she honed her body and heart to the utmost limit —

"You work hard, huh"

"—!! "

At the sudden voice Xiaolei turned in one motion. At the same time she turned to confront the instant enemy, she set up Kokuzen including a frozen, frank intent to kill.

But the girl the spear was trusted at, didn't show any reaction towards it.

At the entrance of the dojo, her shoulder touching the gate that remained opened, lightly leaning against it, she looked at Xiaolei with folded arms.

"What do you want—"

"It's not good to train too much — Or is this a diversion? "

Smoothly averting the unfriendly question, the girl — Ayano, continued talking.

As if poked in a painful spot, Xiaolei shut her mouth.

Even she didn't expect this kind of practice full of idle thought ho have results, rather she understood it could be harmful.

But, even so —

"Well, I think I understand the feeling of not being able to motionlessly stay in one place but don't destroy the dojo, okay?"

For Ayano that was nothing more but a silly joke.

But for Xiaolei agonizing over her own weakness, she could only hear those words full of severe sarcasm.

“…is that, sarcasm? “

“—Ha? “

“Is it an insinuation that I cannot perfectly control Kokusen!? “

The girl screamed with a violent emotion.

She understood deep in her heart that she was venting her anger but even so she did not stop.

The reality she was unable to change, the sense of helplessness she could do nothing about, she pushed all that onto Ayano and scowled at her with the intent to kill.

“…”

In silence, Ayano accepted that glint in the eye — unexpectedly, her gaze spontaneously slipped away, with a smooth motion.

Without showing vigilance to the girl who was about to spring at her at any moment, she calmly took off her her stockings, entered the dojo and walked to the wall.

And then, she took a six feet wood cane hanging on the wall and threw it at Xiaolei.

She took a wooden sword for herself and nimbly swung it to ascertain its weight.

"For now, I think there's a more meaningful way to use your time instead of worrying by yourself endlessly and become unable to control your urge to destroy, no?"

The point of the wooden sword was exactly aiming at Xiaolei's eye.

The distance between was roughly three meters. For a sword that was rather far but for a cane that was already within reach.

"You, do you think you can be my opponent? ", declared Xiaolei with unconcealed contempt to Ayano who suggested they become sparring partners.

In spite of doing nothing but run away from her attacks during yesterday's fight.

What's more, even if Ayano were to say *"Let's stop then"*, right now she didn't felt like stopping.

She wouldn't pardon her even if Ayano turned her back on.

— This is what <<picking a fight>> means.

"I'll beat you up until you're unable to stand and never will you treat me with contempt! "

Without restraining that boiling ferocious impulse, Xiaolei grasped the cane tightly. And then —

“Haa! “

Without signaling the start, she fired a sudden thrust with all her strength. The aim was the throat.

Clearly exceeding the practice level, it was a blow meant to kill.

But, without showing surprise, Ayano lightly shifted the wooden sword and handled it. Even the next attack, extremely easily.

But even so, without pausing her hands, Xiaolei continued to wield the spear.

The girl’s tactics were exceedingly standard. In any case, capitalizing on the lengthy distance, she increased her attack from a place where the enemy’s hits couldn’t reach.

It was simple but there were few gaps. Those thrusts that attached more importance to numbers that power was turning so quickly it seemed it’s pointed end was split in several ones and didn’t allow the opponent to get closer.

Thus, since the opponent’s sword couldn’t shorten the distance, she could never be defeated.

Rather than attacking, Xiaolei continued to stab like she was molding a <<wall>> that defended against the invader enemy before her eyes.

Of course, she couldn't continue that move eternally but her limit was still very far.

"If I hit once it's the end"

It doesn't matter where. At the very least she must disorder her posture.

After that, regardless of consent or refusal, if she can continue hitting her, in three seconds her blood-stained lump of meat will lie down on the floor.

Her cheeks distorted with a dark joy, Xiaolei attacked incessantly without break.

But, immediately following —

Ghan!

With a clear sound, the pole was thrown up right overhead.

Ayano who until now continued to ward off the attack with lowest movement, suddenly and forcefully brushed away the cane.

Although Xiaolei's posture was only slightly thrown out of order, she quickly brought back the cane.

But matching the timing of her returning, Ayano reduced the distance.

“You—! “

Xiaolei unleashed the thrust away cane once more. But as if matching that, Ayano too swung right in front the wood sword.

Because her posture was inadequate, the power of Xiaolei’s blow was somewhat weaker.

Conversely Ayano’s attack was a blow with plenty body strength behind it.

The wooden sword with a superior power , at the same time it adverted the cane’s trajectory, it advanced as if gliding on that surface and with unparalleled accuracy guided by the cane it faced Xiaolei.

It was a blow that was both offensive and defensive. Understanding her unavoidable defeat in front of the wooden sword drawing near her eyes, Xiaolei unintentionally closed her eyes.

“Kuh……?”

But, no matter how much time passes the impact doesn’t come. Timidly opening her eyes —

“Wha!? “

Before her eyes, or rather leaving a millimeter gap in the space between her eyes and the pointed end, the wooden sword was thrust.

It skillfully stopped just before her.

Traditional fencing, because of the hardness of the skull and its roundness and because the blade cannot follow it properly, is a school that avoids striking <<the face>> but for Ayano, the successor of Enraiha, something like that it's irrelevant.

In front of that overwhelming destructive power, no matter how solid a bone is, for her it's the same as thin paper. It's impossible to protect the fragile brain inside.

That's right, without a doubt, this is a certain fatal wound — which means she was perfectly defeated.

"Kuuh…", moaned Xiaolei biting her lips in disgrace.

Looking up, in her field of vision divided in two parts by the wooden sword, Ayano was watching intently this way.

That facial expression was thoroughly tranquil and no joy for paying yesterday's debt could be felt.

— As though, the victory was obvious and the necessity to be glad was found nowhere.

"Huh— Kazuma said so yesterday but Xiaolei doesn't display any technique. It is beyond monotonous. You shouldn't be negligent thinking you'll win and should aim at varying your attack a bit more"

In addition she took the role of mentor and went as far as to point out her faults.

At that humiliation that burned her entire body, the hand holding the cane trembled.

In truth, she understood it yesterday. That this girl was clearly more stronger than she.

Or to put it another way, she was weaker even than this girl.

Weaker.

Weaker than Kannagi Ayano, weaker than Yagami Kazuma,

weaker than Christian Roengram,

weaker than Gaia.

"Why…"

In spite of having to kill her enemies no matter what, she cannot bring them down — she does not have the power to do so.

"Why…why am I, so weak? "

That sorrowful wailing reverberated in the dojo.

"…"

Unable to find appropriate words, Ayano was silent.

It wasn't just words.

She could do nothing for this wounded girl

In spite of the fact she couldn't let it continue like this, she couldn't skillfully speak, and even though she knew it would be absolutely clumsy to neglect the way Xiaolei was right now, she did not know what to do.

Ayano too has the experience of important people getting killed.

But, in her case before her anger at the killers had time to brew in resentment and the desire for revenge, everything was settled.

Therefore Ayano couldn't sympathize with the dark passion of an avenger and the *"I'll kill him even if I have to sacrifice everything"* kind of thoughts.

For this reason, she was able to stop the rampaging Kazuma who was swallowed once in a torrent of those kind of thoughts but — also for this reason she

couldn't say anything to Xiaolei, one step away from loosing it.

"…On this occasion, it should be good to have a talk with Kazuma, huh? "

"What? "

At the proposal she unexpectedly thought of, Xiaolei grimaced dissatisfied from the bottom of her heart.

"What will talking with that frivolous man do for me? "

"No, well — he is certainly frivolous and there's nothing you can do about it normally "

Even though she readily agreed, Ayano added a sentence Xiaolei found unpardonable.

"But he once planned his revenge and then, he accomplished it. "

"Wha—? "

She saw yesterday that he was a model-like frivolous and thoughtless man that didn't even know the word revenge so Xiaolei opened her eyes wide.

But quickly curved her lips in cynicism and declared with scorn.

"Well, for him revenge comes easy no matter who the opponent is. Or rather, with so much power at his disposal he wasn't able to protect what was important? "

At Xiaolei, sneering at what a careless guy he was, Ayano showed an unbelievably bitter smile.

"It wasn't like that. Because back then Kazuma wasn't a Jutsushi but only a normal person. "

"What…? He wasn't, a Jutsushi? "

"You heard yesterday about him being a direct descendant of Kannagi, right? But, he was completely lacking when it comes to the ability of Enjutsu.

That's why, because he was judged to be incompetent and useless he was driven out of the family. "

"Wha…that means…"

At the cruel history that couldn't even be guessed from Kazuma right now, Xiaolei lost her words.

Looking straight at her, Ayano talked without stopping.

"He left the house, fortuitously met his loved one, lost even that and then obtained power for the sake of revenge. Although I don't know the particulars. "

"……I see"

At the end of a very long silence, Xiaolei murmured so, quietly.

That was surprising.

Every man has his history but that kind of man lacking sincerity was burdened with such a heavy past.

"So, what's up with that? "

"Eh? "

At the sudden retort, Ayano stared in wonder.

"I sympathize with his past. But then, what kind of advantage would I gain from talking to him? Should I ask him about revenge know-how?

But, after all, he succeeded in his revenge because he had enough power to do so, nothing more that that, right? "

That's right. After all, it was only that.

Kazuma won because he was stronger. And because she was weaker she couldn't win.

That was like a mathematic formula, a cruel but impartial logic.

There is no place for sentiments to cut it, nothing tricks can overthrow. Therefore, there's no point talking with Kazuma.

Xiaolei concluded so but Ayano shook her head together with a bitter smile.

“It’s not like that — even after carrying out his revenge Kazuma can properly live on, don’t you see? But in your case, nothing comes to mind after revenge. “

“—you mean, you don’t thing I’ll succeed? “

“No, can’t you see I’m not talking about success or failure — it’s about what will you do after you finish your revenge. I just cannot imagine any kind of vision after. “

“…”

Xiaolei completely couldn’t understand what Ayano was trying to say. — No, she rather wanted to deny that reasoning.

In any case, entrusting herself to the boiling discomfort, she bluntly said over her shoulder.

“I don’t know what that means. Besides, that is inconsequential. “

“Hmmm, I see”

Ayano tilted her head to the side in confusion. But because she herself didn’t accurately knew what she was trying to say, she let it go.

Taking advantage of that, Xiaolei forcibly changed the subject.

"By the way, what kind of guy did he take his revenge on? Since he needed so much power? It was by some chance someone famous? "

"Aah— yeah— from what I heard it was Erwin Leszar"

"Hee—, that seems like a big-shot"

Xiaolei was calmly throwing in the appropriate words in the conversation but when the meaning of that name permeated through her brain, all blood ran from her face.

"…eeh? "

"I'm telling you, Erwin Leszar. The one from <<Almagest>>. But then I only heard this from another person and didn't check it with Kazuma"

"…Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!? "

With the biggest shock she had since she came to Japan, Xiaolei screamed to her heart's content.

"Aah—, by the way"

Several minutes were required for Xiaolei to regain her composure.

Trying to soothe one way or another the girl who drew closer and grabbed her, pressing question after question, there was something Ayano worried about ever since she peeked inside the dojo.

"Are these the same clothes as yesterday?

"It can't be helped, right? I didn't have enough composure to bring a change of clothes. "

"…then, your underwear? "

"…"

Xiaolei replied in silence at Ayano asking even more questions.

Unintentionally Ayano looked at the ceiling.

After several seconds, with a facial expression wondering what to decide, she quickly declared:

"Let's go shopping"

"—ha? "

"It's not *ha?*, right? A girl with nothing more but the clothes on her back! No matter how much you pretend to be a man, there's no need to go so far and imitate a man's sloppiness! "

Talking on and on in an indignant tone to the dumbfounded Xiaolei, she turned a critical glance all over her clothes.

"Anyway, you must get ready to change close immediately. I'm telling you, you have no right to refuse. If you like, it's fine to borrow from me — "

Ayano stared at Xiaolei's physique — especially the area around her chest.

"The size doesn't seem to fit"

"I'm sooo sorry! — no, not even that, carelessly going shopping in this kind of situation — are you stupid? "

Although overpowered by the force that won't take no for an answer, Xiaolei eagerly tried to rebut.

As expected, because she wasn't very familiar with insults in the Japanese language, her way of speaking was pretty direct but Ayano didn't give a damn.

"Then, what will you do? We don't know how many days it will take to settle things with those guys and you plan to wear the same clothes all the way? "

"…I'm properly washing my underwear. "

"What of it? As piece of mind that's a complete failure—"

Ayano relentlessly knocked down the whispered objection.

"Besides, there's nothing we can do at the present. We don't even know the enemies' whereabouts. "

At present, Kazuma and the Special Information Storage Room were investigating in all directions.

For Ayano, an Enjutsushi, and Xiaolei, whose investigating ability was good but who couldn't oppose the enemy by herself there was nothing to do but be on stand-by until the result will appear.

"Then, it's preferable to pro-actively go out and maybe they will be lured to attack and the development can be speed up. "

"Just the two of us? "

"Of course, I'm calling Kazuma too. If we are really attacked, it would be difficult if it's just the two of us. "

"…I understand. Let's go. "

After a silence of a few seconds when she seemed to think of something, Xiaolei nodded shortly.

Part 3

"—So, why do I have to accompany the two of you shopping? "

The summoned Kazuma was pouting as expected. He was called out for a diversion that could lure out the enemy so it was only natural.

"But, we can't help it. Because this child came to Japan with only what she's wearing. "

"Then lend her some of yours", replied Kazuma without but after suddenly looking at Xiaolei's body, especially her chest, he shook his head.

"Impossible, huh? "

"…Are you guys picking a fight? "

Xiaolei glared with angered eyes at the two.

It must be their imagination but her glint in the eye thick with thirst for blood was more intense than their first meeting.

"Why is she so angry? "

"Because I already made that joke"

"Hmm, I see. It's no good telling a joke twice, yeah "

Kazuma nodded solemnly. But, of course, that kind of attitude could only rub Xiaolei the wrong way even more.

"you…guys…!"

"But well — there's that, right? "

Plainly disregarding the reaction of the angered girl, Kazuma continued.

"You shouldn't be that pessimistic, no? In this world there are guys who worship smaller than small, AA"

"What do you mean? "

"What, you ask? Boobs"

"I'll kill you! "

While blushing at the too straightforward answer, Xiaolei fired Kokusen while it was still covered.

Extremely easy, Kazuma avoided that. Even more than that, he even stopped the wind blade that was about to be released impulsively from the sacred treasure before it happened.

It seems that he got the hang of it from yesterday's fight.

The exasperated Xiaolei didn't even notice the significance of it.

"Uuuu…I'm…I'm going back! ", she screamed halfway crying as the attack she fired in a frenzy was completely avoided.

Even when taking a rougher attitude, after all she had the upbringing of an Ojou-sama and wasn't used being ridiculed this way.

But, Ayano quickly grabbed the girl's hand about to run.

"Wait please. What about the clothes I should buy if you're not there? "

"Buy some suitable ones! "

"No. Leaving clothes aside, I can't conjecture the size of your underwear. If you wear a bra that's not fit for you, even if they are small, your breasts will get smaller "

"Don't say small! "

"That's right. Besides the shape will be ruined. Breast that are shaped poorly beside being small won't even be noticed by perverts who like small breasts. "

"Who is a fetish for perverts!? "

In a tone as if she was biting, Xiaolei turned over almost twisting her neck.

This time she drew closer to Ayano.

"You, aren't you too good a match for this guy!? "

"No, this is all thanks to you"

"—ha? "

At the uncertain response, Xiaolei stared in wonder.

Thereupon, Ayano send a gaze full of gratitude towards the girl —

"It's because I'm always in the situation of him messing around with me. This is the first time I experience such calmness when being together with Kazuma. Thank you, everyone! "

That was said in a tone loaded with a flow of emotions.

The girl that was used in a totally different manner from the way a decoy should, warped her lips, pained from the bottom of her heart, and spat out.

"…you're the worst, both of you…"

—And then, approximately three hours after.

Changed in the clothes she just bought — obstinately men's wear — appearing to have exhausted all her energy, Xiaolei sat down dead tired on one of the benches in the rest area.

"…this is only shopping but…but why is it so…"

"A woman's shopping is lengthy, isn't that general knowledge? ", said Kazuma not seeming to be worn-out.

Incidentally, Ayano, still full of vitality, after finishing buying clothes for Xiaolei, was bustling about here and there searching clothes for her.

"…I, I never felt so tired before when shopping. "

"That's— since you're the Fuan family's Ojou-sama I imagine that conversely, the stores employers would ask how to be of use. How could that be tiring? "

"…is that wrong? "

"No? Think about it like the inferiority complex of a poor person and don't mind it. "

"…"

Xiaolei glared at Kazuma in silence. It's inevitable that all of this man's speech and conduct hit a nerve every time.

"Besides, why aren't you tired? "

"Because if you don't have to put someone in a good humor it's the same like taking a stroll. When the shopping companion gets tires it's almost invariably mental fatigue."

If one were to simply speak during the exercise the degree of weariness due to shopping can be disregarded.

In spite of this, if even adult males give up on this it means the emotional fatigue is very great.

For example, if one were made to accompany someone to an unfamiliar place which was very uncomfortable and made to endlessly compare clothes with a <<which one suits me most >>, a trivial word can become fatal, that sort of thing.

But, Kazuma naturally doesn't humor Ayano and for example if he were to accompany her to a lingerie shop, instead of being calm he would be very shameless so he wouldn't get tired.

"…how long will this continue? "

"Until Ayano is satisfied, of course. Ask the person itself for a specific time. "

"…"

At that careless answer, Xiaolei let out a small sigh. And then, she suddenly looked at her feet.

There were two paper bags full of clothes there.

What she bought — rather, what she was made to buy was three times the amount but everything that

wasn't necessary for the time being was ordered to be delivered home.

Beyond the fact that the danger of an attack wasn't low, she couldn't move under all those baggage.

By the way, Kazuma was empty handed.

Not even Ayano would dream this man could accept to carry luggage so she didn't ask him from the beginning.

As a matter of fact Xiaolei was grateful for the shopping.

For her who escaped with nothing else in her hands but Kokusen, of course she didn't had clothes to change in but nothing remained after her traveling expenses.

— But, even so.

"Geez, does she really understand the situation, that woman? "

"Hmm, I wonder", replied Kazuma in a vapid tone.

That attitude seemed to have even less tension than Ayano's and Xiaolei reflexively grimaced.

In spite of possessing so much power, he wasn't self-conscious of the duty that accompanied that power.

He was frivolous and lacked sincerity — she was also jealous of him maybe but Xiaolei didn't think this man was suitable to have power.

But, even if that was true, she could not ignore him.

She has something she must ask him no matter what. Because that was the reason she went along with this shopping.

Without looking at Xiaolei, she said while looking at the floor.

"…Yagami"

"Hmm? "

"It seems that once, you lived for the sake of revenge, right? "

"…Aah"

Kazuma instantly shifted his attention to where Ayano was, but answered shortly as if he didn't heard something unnecessary.

Once again, Xiaolei asked directly.

"Do you regret it? "

"No"

"—Are you satisfied? "

"No"

At the second question, Kazuma replied in exactly the same manner.

At that reply you could read nothing into, Xiaolei probed his facial expression with a side glance and asked again.

“Then, why? “

“Because there was nothing else to do. “

“Wha— did you kill him for that half-baker reason, that Erwin Leszar? “

“Aah— I killed him, I killed him. “

Warding off Xiaolei’s criticism with a nonchalant air, Kazuma declared thoroughly frivolous.

“I chopped him until his body turned to lumps of nothing more that a hundred grams, his soul was taken by the devil he had contracted with and dragged to the bottom of hell. Right now he’s being used like a slave or his power returned to its origins and he was terminated, one of these two”

Remembering the spectacle that time, Kazuma laughed with a simmering happiness and took the opportunity to ask.

“So, what of it? “

"…Previously, I heard about that man from father. He greatly admired him. He said it wasn't an exaggeration to call him the all-time high genius of magic. "

Kazuma was silent. but, without minding it, Xiaolei continued.

"He's the man who lay the foundation of present day magic. He was born anew these last three hundred years, and possibly all resurrection Jutsu and most theories, they all originate from him.

Did you have the right to kill that kind of genius? "

"If I think about what you're trying to say—"

Letting out a small laughter, Kazuma shrugged his shoulders.

"Then, what about you? "

"What? "

"For example, if that odd couple killed your entire family for the sake of the greater good, would you forgive them? "

"That's…"

For an instant Xiaolei faltered. But that was definitely not because she was hesitating.

That's right, hesitating it's unthinkable.

It's impossible to hesitate.

No matter the reason, even if the entire world would recognize their actions as justified —

"That's how it is. Whether it's righteousness or reason, those have no connection to revenge.

For example, even if what he did would bring permanent peace to this world, at that time, if Tsoi Rin had to be sacrificed no matter what to save the world from destruction, who cares about that? “

Kazuma spun his words in that voice so flat it made one shiver.

“No matter what, I cannot forgive him. I cannot allow a world where Tsoi Rin dies but he gets to live carefree. No matter how many chances I will be given, I would only choose one way. No matter by what means, I will invariably kill him. “

“You…”

Faced with that expressionless mask <<being>> in front of her, Xiaolei muscles along the spine shivered.

Already saturated by hatred and resentment, because those became its normal state, it became expressionless without the possibility of change.

Together with a shudder, Xiaolei perceived that by instinct.

That was the result she would arrive at.

“What’s with that Because there was nothing else to do crap? “

She understood that frivolous reason for revenge was a lie. Because, although she didn't arrived at the end of it, Xiaolei was following the same road.

"That was like— I could think of nothing else but revenge !"

"What's the matter? "

"Whaaa!? "

At that sudden, easy-going tone of voice, Xiaolei jumped up from the bench, her fright laid bare.

Turning around, that frozen expressionless that was there was already gone and the same aimless, cynical smile was looking here.

"Wha— what so suddenly? "

"It's not *what* right? You were to one to open the discussion so don't get lost in your own world in the middle of it? "

"Uu…"

It was a very plausible identification so Xiaolei mumbled, having no way to object.

But, she didn't feel like continuing. If she were to continue she would come to realize without wanting to.

That for the sake of carrying out her revenge she must also become so.

She understood only one fragment of it, but her heart was swaying this much.

If she were to know even more, she will maybe become incapable of carrying out her revenge.

"No, I—"

Adverting her eyes as if trying to escape, Xiaolei searched for an excuse to interrupt the conversation.

But Kazuma, looking like he didn't understood that, asked cheerfully like it was an ordinary conversation.

"What did Ayano say to you? "

"Eeh? "

"Hmm? You heard it from her, no about me"

"Eeh, ah, aah — that's— yeah"

"So, by making me the example, what did she say to you? That revenge is meaningless, that your deceased family doesn't wish for something like that, did she say that kind of whitewashing? "

"Ah, no, it wasn't like that—"

While clumsily narrating it, Xiaolei felt something close to relief.

The contents of this conversation are not easy but compared with the continuation of the one before, it was by far preferable.

Leaving her vigor take its natural course, before she realized it, she even talked about the details of the fight where she lost to Ayano, which was supposed to be unrelated.

And Kazuma was not the kind of person to overlook such a thing.

"I see, you lost even to Ayano. You seem to only be losing. If you use a false name, you should call yourself <<loser dog>> from now on! "

"Don't give me names! Rather, more that that, what was that about? Do you understand what she tried to say? "

As expected, she was bothered about it a little so she pressed the question, pretending like she thought about it, but Kazuma faintly smiled bitterly.

"Frankly, that was surprising. The fact that she pondered about something to that extent, no, she didn't think about it saying *I cannot explain this*.

She just somehow noticed it with her wild sixth sense. "

If so it's very typical of her — Xiaolei obstinately asked Kazuma agreeing by himself.

"What does it mean? "

"Don't mind it."

"I do mind it! "

Pulled in so much, that reaction was natural.

But, Kazuma eluded the girl's investigation thoroughly.

"Even if I were to tell you right now, it would be meaningless. Because you will really only hear an <<inconsequential thing>>.

You can forget about it now. If you think about something you don't need, the blade will grow dull"

"…"

She made a face like she didn't agree in the least but at the same time she understood Kazuma had no intention of confessing.

Although reluctantly, Xiaolei gave up on the investigation.

But even Kazuma, it's not like he didn't teach because he was malicious or rather didn't teach her just because he was malicious.

What Ayano was trying to say regarding her <<what lies beyond revenge>> — if she were to present it in a more embarrassing but easy to understand manner, one would be reminded of words like <<tomorrow>> and <<hope>>, the illustration of a facing forward anticipated future.

In a word, *the action that is not connected to the future is barren*.

Taking your revenge is splendid but after you finish it you must earnestly become happy no matter what.

She feared for Xiaolei not because of the act of revenge itself but for Xiaolei's attitude of throwing everything away for the sake of revenge and not looking back.

Compared with the *revenge is useless* bullshit, it was something much more thoughtful but, after all, was nothing but lip service from someone whose body wasn't scorched in hatred.

Besides, if the person was able to focus on the future he wouldn't plan such a back facing deed from the beginning.

Therefore, right now he couldn't talk with Xiaolei about such things.

Rather than rejecting it because she thought it trivial, it would be worse to think of her own self-protection because of an untactful influence.

Even at the best of times, her ability was inferior. If she were to loose her resolution to risk her life above that, the probability of killing that would-be avenger would only be higher.

That was, at the very least, one part of the reason she didn't tell her.

"—But well, if you want to die, just die. It won't bother me. "

Kazuma was this kind of man.

And then, when the conversation was about to close and concluded, at that time—

"—Hmm? "

He suddenly raised his head, quizzically squinting his eyes.

One beat later, Xiaolei noticed too. That face that was swaying with confusion — was coated in the color of hatred, and she decisively stood up.

"Where…? This way! "

Knowing the specifics of the location, she took Kokusen and started running without looking left or right.

"He—y, wait a minute"

Kazuma called her to a halt, but since he didn't even stood up from the bench that apathetic restrain could have no effect.

Xiaolei didn't turn around but darted off speedily.

Luckily, it should be called, Ayano came back before three minutes passed.

"Huh? "

Ayano looked at Kazuma, sitting alone on the bench with a doubtful gaze.

"Xiaolei? "

"She's gone"

"Where? "

"Hmm—"

At the again reasonable question, Kazuma inclined his head as if contemplating,

"Up or down, which way do you think she went? "

"What's up with that, didn't you ask her were she went? Did she went to buy something, that child? "

"Rather that buying, it's more like she went to throw away something. "

"—What? "

"Her life"

At the seriousness of the words declared so smoothly, Ayano became speechless. But, she immediately understood the meaning of those cryptic words.

"Wait a second, up and down are heaven and hell!? She <<went>> to one of those? "

"Humph, something like that"

"Did they appeared? "

"No, somewhere for from here water and earth spirits are unnaturally noisy. The moment she sensed that, she rushed in.

Although I don't understand what she tries to do by herself"

"You should have stopped her!"

"I did stop her"

"Not by saying <<stop>> when you knew from the beginning she would ignore you! ", declared Ayano in one breath as if she saw everything.

But of course, as one would expect, she knew Kazuma. She was flawlessly correct.

“I couldn’t be help, right? I am your guard. I can’t go chasing after something else. “

“Geez, let’s follow her! Which way she went? “

“This way”

Right after pointing in a rough direction, Ayano dashed to the entrance of the department store.

And then, when she was about to continue after that — suddenly, she turned around. What was there was large number of paper bags full of new clothes scattered on the ground,

“It’s not my fault, huh? “, murmuring irresponsibility, this time Ayano started running.

Part 4

That day, the Metropolitan Police Department Special Information Storage Room's newcomer, Isurughi Daiki, was walking on the street with his senpai, Shimon Yuuto.

Of course, it was during the job.

He did not have the hobby of going on dates for male bonding. To say nothing of he fact that walking alongside this man was the worst kind of competition.

"…"

Daiki raises a gaze full of envy at Yuuto. Just one phrase was enough to describe that man — he was a handsome man.

He height exceeded 180 centimeters and he had a slim physique without any flab, and finely chiseled features, un-Japanese in appearance.

For Daiki, with a small build and child-faced, to this day mistaken for a middle school pupil, he was the kind of man no matter how much he envied, it still wasn't enough.

"Waah, what a bore…"

The man accompanying him, languid because he couldn't flirt in the middle of the job, abandoned the yearning he was secretly harboring and, on the contrary looked at him awkward as if saying *"I don't want to become like that"*.

"Hey—, I'm tired, let's enter a tea house. After all, we won't find them. "

"No way. What will you do if the Chief finds about this? "

"At that time become the representative to be angry at. "

"I disagree! "

Although answering like that, not even him had any will to work anymore.

Their current mission was a manhunt, the search of two Jutsushi, Chris and Gaia. They understood this mission ordered by Kirika was urgent and from the characteristics of their outward appearance they had the self-confidence they could certainly recognize them even without a photo.

"How should we search for them? What is the probability of coming across them coming across them by walking randomly— "

“Hmm? What, you didn’t know? “

Yuuto looked shocked at Daiki, who was murmuring in a puzzled tone.

“What do you mean? “

“What, you say — right now, we’re the only ones searching. We’re only waiting for the result of the <<Sightseer>> guys. “

“—Why only us? “

“It’s not *us*. You’re the only one they expect something out of. “

“—? “ Daiki still didn’t understand. What on Earth was expected of him?

“I don’t really understand? My ability doesn’t have a searching aspect. “

“The <<Demon Eater>>, huh? It’s not that. You have another — ever acting ability, right? “

“”…”

At Yuuto’s words, Daiki became silent, making a disagreeable face with al his strength.

Certainly, he had two — practically one special ability, but with two different forms of manifestation, it was somehow guessed.

One was the <<Demon Eater>> and the other one the manifestation of abnormal good luck regarding a critical situation — after miraculously reaching a calamity.

There's no need to say it but Daiki wasn't to happy about that.

The meaning this power had was falling into dangerous and desperate situations, and then as a reaction, he was devastatingly unlucky in his everyday life.

"…What about it? Either way, it doesn't seem to have anything to do with me. "

Yuuto showed an ominous smile to his dissatisfied kouhai, and whispered in a low voice.

"What it we find the guys we're searching for and it comes to a fight, you, are you confident of winning? "

"That's obviously impossible! ", answered Daiki without hesitating for a moment.

Excessively reasonable, he wasn't even ashamed. The separation between people like them with modest supernatural powers and that existence was like that between them and ordinary people.

For example, even for a professional boxer there's no shame being knocked down by a tank. Just like a gold medalist runner won't feel bitter about not being slower than a motorcycle.

The difference between them and they just just like that or maybe even worse.

"Well then, can you find the target? Finding it is the definition of *unlucky*. Don't you agree? "

"…Well, I do"

"Of course, it's impossible for us to find them without the other party noticing us, that would be *lucky*. And when it comes to you, it's impossible to have that kind of good luck. "

"…"

He was extremely unwilling to be called that but he had no rebuttal. Helplessly, he waited for the continuation in silence.

"If it's you, you might be able to find the target because of your natural bad luck. And then, if you find yourself in a pinch, maybe you're able to escape because of your good luck. But the opponent is who he is. There is the possibility your own good luck won't be enough. Therefore, I was appointed to help you"

"…Even if you say so, I don't think one or two people will make a difference. "

"That's true. But, if you were to bear the full brunt of it, certainly the <<Demon Eater>> will come out. With that power, even if you cannot win, you can stall. So, taking that opportunity I will run and report to the Chief — "

"Wait a minute! ", Daiki shouted angry, as expected.

"What's up with that inhuman strategy? If it's so, why don't we do this the other way? Senpai, you should protect the body of your kouhai! "

"Don't say such impossible things!"

Yuuto irresponsibly waved his hand.

"I don't have that kind of inhuman, wicked power like you do. I won't become something like a shield. "

"What are you saying, <<Siegfried>>?"

"Whoa! Don't call people by the name of their power. There's something wrong with a secret society-like code name. "

"…isn't this pretty much like that?", retaliated Daiki with a bitter expression.

He wanted from the beginning to become a regular policeman but because of the power even he didn't know about Kirika had her eyes on him and he was dragged against his will in this world.

Consequently, his sense of values as a civilian was still strong and couldn't even get rid of his suspicions towards the Special Investigation Unit to which he belonged.

"I didn't want to get involved with such doggy things like spirits and Youma. "

"Saying such things…since your power has a special quality, the possibility of living without encountering them is pretty low, I think"

"I, I wanted to deal with the crimes of regular people and someday become a detective! "

"No, that's impossible", concluded Yuuto without hesitation.

Although unfortunate, when it came to this, Daiki's character supported Yuuto's view.

Of course, a policeman shouldn't have a scary face but being mistaken for a minor during night lookouts, he couldn't be given a job of protecting someone.

"Besides, you should look at reality a bit more. I think that Kirika-chan asked you something like *If you want to become a detective please change your assignment*, no? "

"Uuuu…that…that's…"

"To say it would curse you. If you even think about leaving the Special Investigation Unit would ensure you will die in the first line — No, even more, that woman would catch your soul and turn you into a sorcerer's divination tool. "

"Waah…No way…", Daiki lamented, having his future void of hope or dreams pointed out to him.

Yuuto clapped the shoulder of his Kouhai and advised, trying to console him.

"Well, don't be so discouraged. Your ability to evade death is top-class. If you manage to survive long enough, I'm sure that someday you…"

Pausing in the middle of it, his face became stiff.

"…senpai?"

Daiki peeked at Yuuto's face in wonder and he cast down his eyes with a rather false calmness.

"Quicker than what I thought"

"What? "

"If the enemy can be found by such a halfhearted method, from now on you will be the first recruited for the investigation of dangerous enemies, and every time they will try to kill you, to torment you and curse you. "

"…Don't imagine such unpleasantness"

"So it's unpleasant, as expected? "

"It's unpleasant! "

"I see — what a pity"

Including as much sympathy as possible, Yuuto hit Daiki's shoulder once more.

From that attitude, it was easy to guess. The young man who looked like a boy looked up at his senpai with a pale face.

"H-hey…senpai?"

"That shop window. Slowly turn around. "

Turning in the direction Yuuto pointed out , he clumsily twisted his neck. Doing so, he saw in that huge window pane the reflection of a silver haired beautiful young man and a muscular short one.

The duo was extremely peculiar and probably very singular even in the middle of Tokyo. It was obvious it was the target they were searching for.

"No, nooooooo waaaaaayyy!"

Daiki screamed inside his heart. But while doing so, the duo reflected in the show window, walked in the opposite direction from them.

It was a brief moment of unintentional relief.

"We're following them"

Yuuto gave out the heartless order.

"Eeeh, shouldn't we let them get away? "

"I don't really care but when Kirika-chan finds about this, will you take responsibility, right? "

"Uuuu, th-that's…"

"If you quit here's hell, if you go forward there's hell, that's your limit. "

"Waaaaaah! "

Overwhelmed by Yuuto's thoroughly *other people's problem* laugh, Daiki let out all the piled-up tears.

"Where do you think they are going? "

"Who knows"

While tailing Chris and Gaia, both exchanged a whisper in a small voice.

Incidentally, although both of them had many jobs involving non-human opponents, they didn't excess at something so mundane as tailing someone. To make

matters worse, this job where they risked their life gave them completely cold feet.

They planned on running away as soon as the enemy began showing even the smallest sign of alertness.

But, lucky or unlucky, they looked like absolutely not realizing they were tailed. Therefore, the duo continued chasing after them —until it became the wrong time to quit.

"Huh? "

Immediately following the curved street corner, Daiki let out a confused voice.

In spite of the fact that the street continued for a little in a straight line, for some reason the subjects of their tail were not in it.

Thinking it odd, he took a few unsteady steps but suddenly Yuuto grabbed his arm from behind.

"—Eeh? "

"We've been exposed. Run. "

"No, that's impossible, right? "

A soft voice concluded. From behind.

They both turned around with the fastest movement possible.

As feared, the silhouettes of both Chris and Gaia were standing there.

They didn't understand the detail but before they knew the shadow was seen through and they seemed to have taken a roundabout path.

"Waa…aaaah…"

"So, what on earth did you intend to do by following us? ", asked Chris cracking a smile at the confused Daiki.

That was a smile that normally would make Daiki be charmed even if it belonged to someone of the same sex but understandably, today he didn't have room for that.

He looked for Yuuto seeking salvation but, that man was hidden behind his kouhai, brimming with the intent to push him.

The hand supporting his back was definitely not to encourage him but but to push him towards Chris when the time comes.

It was clear he prepared himself to run by using a decoy.

"it's…it's too much…"

Daiki was crying in his heart but by really crying out loud, the situation wouldn't get any better.

Racking his brain like never before he searched for an explanation that those two would consent to.

"A…actually…to tell you the truth, we…are, policemen…"

"The Police? "

Chris looked doubtful at them — particularly at Daiki. Daiki's voice became even more excited, continuing.

"It, it's true. I am Asian so I might look young but, I am properly of age. If you want I can show you my identification papers. "

Although flustered, Daiki blamed his child face on race. Chris looked at them very long and finally nodded in consent.

"Well, that's fine. So, what does the police want with us? Show you our passports? "

"Well…even inside the police we are belonging to a special department. Do you know about the Special Investigation Unit? It a department related to spirit incidents. "

"Aaah, I heard about that. An organization famous for its uselessness. "

"Uuuuu…"

Faced with that point blank manner of speaking, Daiki spontaneously started crying. He didn't have any particular attachment towards it but when thinking that the organization he belonged to was treated as incompetent because be has in it, he felt overwhelmed as expected.

"Leaving that, we were thinking of asking what such powerful magicians like you doing in Japan…with all due respect, we received orders to follow you"

Mastering all his willpower, he finished the sentence until the end.

It was a pretty clever explanation, Daiki was singing his own praise. Meaning that for the time being, there was no contradiction.

"I see, that's deplorable. ", declared Chris in a sinking tone full of pain.

"De-deplorable, what is? "

"If it's true you're the errand-boy of someone I want to meet, did you finished your verbal message? — if

it's unrelated, there doesn't seem to be a reason to let you live, no?"

A death sentence.

"Whaaah!? If I'm unrelated, there's also no reason to kill me, right? "

"Huh, you didn't know? being stalked by an unknown person is extremely unpleasant, no? ", said Chris while smiling as if nothing in the world bothered him.

Meaning *Die for that*.

"Wait, well, if it's a message you want to transmit, I can do that. Look, because of my line of work, I met with a lot of Practitioners "

"Is that so? But who I want to meet is the daughter of *that* Kannagi Clan, you know? "

"Aah, then, leave it to me. The connection with the Kannagi Clan is pretty deep. ", replied Daiki with a joyful look at the sudden chance.

Chris too, openly nodded delighted at his good luck.

"That's good. Then — tell her to come tomorrow at noon at Shinjuku Central Park. Of course, tell her she should bring the young Fuan prince"

"And the Fujutsushi youngster", added Gaia without hiding his overflowing fighting spirit.

Without showing any sign of his complete defeat yesterday or maybe precisely because of that, he seemed to burn with revenge.

"I understand. I will definitely report it. "

"Thank you very much. But —"

Chris interrupted his speech with a somewhat ominous feeling and stared at Daiki and Yuuto.

He said regretfully.

"For the verbal message, one is enough. "

"Tha — Waaaah!? "

Daiki tried to protest but he was interrupted by another problem as he was suddenly thrust away from the back.

He turned around confused, and saw Yuuto running away with lightning speed.

"Se, senpai!? "

Because he didn't really believe he would use the *tactics*, he instantly forgot the state of affairs.

And then, suddenly calming down, he felt an awfully ominous presence from the back.

"Uuu, aah, hey…"

When timidly turning away, at the center of his field of vision, Chris was smiling with the same elegant air.

But, unlike before, the surrounding were floating with countless water drops defying gravity.

"You have been forsaken. How pitiful. "

"If you think it's pitiful, let me go"

"Even if I said so — carrying out one's words is my creed", declared Chris calmly to Daiki, already on the verge of tears.

His tone was polite but it was easy to understand he had no intention of letting Daiki live. He had that kind of expression.

"Well then, sayonara"

Together with those last parting words, an infinite number of water droplets, rushed towards Daiki with a speed impossible to confirm by sight.

"Hiii"

Resembling a water cutter, the water current that was strongly pressured became a blade that could cut through everything.

It's impossible for a human body to stand against that power that could turn even diamonds into flakes.

Even more, an average human cannot even respond to that speed.

The impeding invisible <<Death>>. No matter how much luck one has, the physical body cannot escape from this <<Death>>.

Consequently—

"Uuu…Waaaaahhh!"

Pulled out by the threat on his life, Daiki's ability, the <<Demon Eater>> was invoked.

That could be said to be one of the peaks of his basic power: reaching a miracle instead of disaster.

The enemy's attack *for some reason* or *miraculously* failed and his body was protected from fatal woulds.

But there are times when that is not enough.

Interfering with fate, the times he cannot escape death, that power switched to a new phase.

In front of the petrified Daiki's eyes, suddenly, a huge hole opened.

That hole gulped down all water bullets that were about to pass through his body and disappeared just as sudden as it appeared.

Nothing remained behind. The change produced by Chris' attack was only Daiki's unsightly appear-

ance, sinking on the floor, his back giving out because of shock.

This was the <<Demon Eater>>. Opening a dimensional hole and swallowing everything that was about to harm himself and expelling it in another dimension.

"Hooo"

Surprised by defending against his attack, Chris let out a frank voice of admiration.

"I see, no matter the puniness, there still exists a state's organization to repel demons. They employ such unique people. "

"Eeh, no, that's— "

Daiki hesitated, mumbling. He heard this power was rare but he absolutely couldn't control it.

If Chris were to amuse himself and attack a second time, this time there was a high possibility he would be turn into a bee hive.

But luckily where Daiki was concerned, Chris turned his attention somewhere else.

"So, will you too show me your ability? "

"Eeeh? "

Following Chris's line of sight, Daiki looked over his shoulder. Doing so, he saw Yuuto that was sup-

posed to have run a long time ago in a cold sweat unable to move.

"Senpai — why? "

As expected, he tilted his head to the side puzzled, not thinking the answer will be *I came to save you*.

But, the question was immediately cleared. Piercing through the asphalt, ivy-like cords coiled around Yuuto's ankles preventing him from running away.

"I don't like those who run leaving a comrade behind. If you want to kill him, do it."

With naked contempt, the Chijutsushi said so, over his shoulder. Chris also didn't seem to have a different opinion.

"All right. Well then, first of all…"

Together with a bland answer, water spirits were summoned once more. This time there weren't a countless number of water droplets but one water sphere materialized and then adjusted its shape to a long, sharp one.

Compared to the attack on Daiki, this was much more careless. Griping that transparent spear in his hand, the beautiful Suijutsushi took a pitching posture.

"No, wait! Wait! Wait! "

Because his legs were bound, Yuuto couldn't run. So he shook his hands and head panicking, trying to stop Chris.

"My power is plain. It would be troubling if you expect a show unique in the whole world. "

"Leaving the boring things aside, show it to me first"

But without caring about it, Chris threw the water spear at him without hesitation.

He easily pierced him.

His chest easily perforated in the middle, Yuuto's eyes opened wide. And then, his body was thrown backwards, and slowly, as if in slow-motion, it fell to the ground.

The body lying down sprawling, didn't even twitch.

"Oh? ", murmured Chris in a tone half surprise and half disappointment.

For a short while he looked at Yuuto but it didn't do anything interesting, only blood was gushing out the whole in his chest.

After several seconds passed again, Chris finally accepted Yuuto died. This time he let out a sight full of disappointment. And then he slowly shook his head.

"How boring. It seems his ability wasn't intended for battle, huh? "

He regretted it, but after all, that was everything he had to say. In a tone of killing people like he was playing, he didn't seem to sincerely reflect upon it.

"Well then, please don't forget the message. "

Those words made Daiki's features, who was staring at Yuuto with a pale face, to jump and look at Chris.

"…"

In a calm tone, Chris emphasized those words to Daiki, who didn't say anything.

"Do you hear me? "

"…Aaah"

That broad reply made Daiki cast down his eyes in shame.

"…Isn't this enough? Let me go"

"Yes, of course. I said from the beginning I will only kill one. "

Generously, with an elegant bow, Chris took his leave letting Daiki live.

And then, Gaia followed too after looking at him full of disgust as if saying *You coward*.

"…Waaaaaaaahh…"

When those two disappeared, Daiki threw himself on the ground in relief and breathed a long sigh.

"I thought I was going to die, really…"

He fleetingly look at the place where his senpai was lying down but quickly changed and looked up at the sky, murmuring.

"You reap what you sow, senpai"

Because of Daiki's character, those words seemed positively cold. But, the reason for them became clear in a few seconds.

"Humph"

Yuuto who seemed to have died, suddenly got up. And then, with a good complexion, as if he didn't lost a drop of blood, he laughed.

"Playing dead after a certain-kill. Even if I say so myself, it was splendid. "

“Isn’t it weird for a human to live after that? The question of pretense is not the problem.”, returned Daiki amazed.

That expression was hateful as usual but there wasn’t much to be surprised about.

Meaning that for them, this wasn’t an unusual situation.

“Geez, isn’t senpai’s constitution much more unreasonable than mine? “

“The fact that your’s is flashy is the reality. But the fault of this technique is that my clothes get torn every time. Do you think this expense is covered? “

“Who knows? Why don’t you ask the chief? “

“Kirika-chan would never forgive something like that! “

“Not my problem even if you tell me! “

It was at the time Daiki replied so at Yuuto, pouting his lips in spite of his age.

A boy holding a spear — or maybe a girl — came rushing.

Finally arriving at the place the Water and Earth spirits had been activated, Xiaolei noticed the figures of two men.

But they were not the ones she was searching for. Xiaolei was disappointed at their escape but she immediately discovered the huge red blood stain on one man's chest.

Looking around the surroundings, she discovered a great number of marks.

There were water puddles everywhere and soil rising through the asphalt.

Matching it to the man's wounds, the state of affairs became clear. Without a doubt, there was a fight here.

Perhaps, between these men and them.

Xiaolei looked at those two including killing intent.

"You two — who did you fought with? "

" — you are? "

The child-faced man asked cautious. That gaze was going back and forth between Xiaolei's girl-like but dangerous expression and the spear she was gripping in her hand.

That was the first time Xiaolei realized Kokusen was bare. Surely, before she ran here it was wrapped

in its pouch but because of her killing intent the spear reacted and the power that leaked out tore it off.

"Are you perhaps, the Fuan Ojou-sama? ", interjected the blood-stained man.

Unbelievable from the quantity of blood-loss that would make one loose consciousness at best, he seemed unnaturally healthy for some reason.

"…who are you people? "

Replying with a question at a question. She had no intention of revealing any information before she knew who they were.

But, in spite of the impenetrable attitude, th blood-stained man accosted her much too familiar.

"There's no need for that way of talking, no? We did our best and worked for Ojou-sama's sake. "

"What…what is this? "

"Aah, we are from the Special Investigation Unit and we were searching for Christian Roengram and Gaia at your — or rather, the Kannagi Clan's request. "

Because she understood the child-faced man's explanation, Xiaolei slightly softened her killing intent.

"Come to think of it, Ayano said something like that"

"That's right, we're not the enemy so please don't make such a scary face. Aaah, my name is Shimon Yuuto. Nice meeting you. "

"I am Isurughi Daiki. Nice meeting you"

The two men introduced themselves with a smile but Xiaolei response was blunt.

"I don't really care about your names. Rather than that, did you find them? "

"Yes just now. They nearly killed us. ", nodded the child-faced one— Daiki.

The girl drew near with a bloodcurdling expression.

"Where? Where did they go? "

"I, I don't know that. Even we, we only managed to survive this. "

While he was being grabbed by the collar and shook, Daiki explained frantically.

Xiaolei looked at him with a plain *what a useless guy* and roughly thrust him away.

"Shit, but, if they're still close…"

Hanging her hopes on a thread, she searched for their presence in the surroundings.

The blood-stained man— Yuuto's voice reached the concentrating girl's ear.

"Aaah, by the way, there's a message from them"

"What—? "

Xiaolei pressed Yuuto with a changed expression.

"Say it! What did they say? "

"Hmmm, what to do—"

But, while lazily evading the girl's spirit, Yuuto smiled somewhat mischievous, or rather lewd.

"We did our best and put our life on the line but there wasn't a single word of thanks. In this situation, without a kiss of appreciation, I don't think I can remember the message…"

Without even letting him finish his sentence, Xiaolei made Kokusen flash and the silver edge was next to the man's neck.

"Wow, a kiss of appreciation, huh? "

Together with that subdued murmur, the last millimeter that separated the blade and the neck was filled.

At the slightly cold feel on his carotid artery, Yuuto's smiling face froze.

"Should I give you a very hot one with this? "

"Aaah, no, that's…I'm sorry"

Yuuto apologized without shame or honor. Daiki gazed at that stiff face amazed and spit the words out together with a sigh.

"…Senpai, does your range include even such children? "

"No, I'm already imaging the five years older version so I'm just trying to call dibs…no, that's a lie, for someone like me even touching your shadow would be too awesome. "

Daiki didn't understand but it seemed like the blade was lightly pressed into the carotid artery.

With a sidelong glance at Yuuto, unfolding a disorganized but insincere explanation, he frankly gave her the message.

"Tomorrow at noon, you are supposed to go at Shinjuku Central Park. You and Ayano-san, together with Yagami-san. "

"…"

"Tomorrow, huh…? Are they setting traps…then, maybe right now…!"

She scowled at Daiki as if shooting through him. And then, grabbing him by the collar, she pressed closer.

"Hey! Where is this Shinjuku Central Park? "

"Eeh…it's this way. There are a lot of signs, so if you follow them, I don't think you can get lost…but, why…?"

There was no answer. By the time he noticed, Xiaolei was running, already ten meters away and faded away, accelerating.

"No, I don't think they'll be there *now*…"

Of course, that murmur didn't reach the girl's ears. He looked at Yuuto, as if saying *what's the deal with her* but he was looking after the running girl, his face breaking into a smile.

"Well, she was a fine aggressive girl. It seems like I found a new preference "

"…Senpai, I'm saying this just to be sure but that's a crime. "

As a human being, as a policeman, Yuuto didn't seem to care.

Chapter 5: What Is Eaten

Part 1

Kazuma suddenly stopped and called Ayano, who was running ahead, to a halt.

"Ayano, wait a second"

"What, you're not going to say you're tired, are you? ", replied Ayano but it was obvious that wasn't the case.

In reality, looking over her shoulder, she saw this man breathing without disturbance.

But then, when he had no motivation, he was the kind of man to say such shameless words as: *I'm tired so I'll take a break*.

"Xiaolei started to move. She's fast. But it doesn't look like she's following something. Did she find some clue? "

This time was different. Ayano asked of Kazuma, who was investigating the surroundings, an even more detailed explanation.

"Where is she headed? "

"This way. From here one is— the ruins of the Tokyo Government Office? The ruins of Shinjuku Central Park? "

"yuck"

At those ill-omened names, Ayano involuntarily grimaced. Those places had been destructed in huge incidents before.

The collapse of the Tokyo Government Office posed an especially big political problem, but Shinjuku's Central Park was even worse.

Because an outrageous being had been summoned there at that time, the Ki released by it made the soil and air there dark even today. You could say it was rotting.

Like a plot of soil that was radiated, you couldn't expect it to naturally recover in a short term.

Because of the preliminary calculations that said that the purification will take from several hundred years to a thousand, in the worst case scenario, Kannagi Genma was requested to use the divine flame and burn it all to the ground.

Reasonably, that idea was frozen. If he didn't do so, nobody wanted to approach it.

"That place is still sinister…Is there someone else there? "

"Hmmm, I don't feel anything in particular — no"

Interrupting his speech, Kazuma strained his eyes as if looking far away.

And then, his mouth warped in a bitter smile or rather, a scornful laugh.

"Oh dear!"

"What's happening? "

"The fight began. The enemies are a Suijutsushi and a Chijutsushi — them"

"—!"

Ayano opened her eyes wide in surprise.

"What on earth is that girl thinking!? She can't possibly win by herself! "

"Well, someone who thinks of revenge can't possibly be rational. I too was excessively rash at times. I had thoroughly attacked all of <<Almagest>>'s branches. "

"…Even though you had no proof Erwin Leszar was there? "

"Yeah. Although there seemed to have been only good civilians inside. But I did pray for their happiness in the next world. "

"You should be cursed, you damn heretic"

Saying so coldly over her shoulder, Ayano brought that dishonest conversation to an end and pressed for action.

"Hurry! Follow me closely, guard! "

"Dear me"

The conclusion was slightly dull.

They both arrived at that place — at the Shinjuku Central Park, exactly at the moment when the water whip manipulated by Chris was piercing Xiaolei's abdomen.

Of course, Gaia was standing beside him.

"Gaah…"

Already without enough force to scream, the girl with wounds all over her body revealed a tiny groan, her knees loosing balance and folding.

The pointed tip of the whip that came out from her back undulated like a living thing. Its color was clearly stained light crimson of the flowing blood.

Like a sneaky living thing, the water whip slipped out of Xiaolei's body. Loosing her support, powerless, the girl's body collapsed.

The blood overflowing from that body collapsed face-up, turned into a pool of blood before her eyes. It was clearly a fatal wound.

"Xi- Xiaolei! "

"Oh, did you too came too? "

Hearing Ayano's shriek, as if he just noticed their presence, Chris replied with an air of composure.

"Although I did say tomorrow, you couldn't abide by the rule, huh? "

And then, complaining so, extremely annoyed, but for those two who didn't hear the massage, it didn't make any sense.

"*did say*, huh? Did you hear something about this?"

"No, but that's not the issue! "

Looking very impatient, Ayano pointed at Xiaolei laying in her own blood.

"We must save Xiaolei quickly! "

"Right now it's impossible. To go and nonchalantly pick her up in front of those them will make us the target. I don't want something like that."

"If…If that's the case!! "

While she was about to complain, Ayano shut her mouth as if noticing something.

"That's right"

Faster that Ayano's words, Kazuma nodded.

"Kill them without delay and pick her up after. That is most reliable. "

Even if they couldn't loose in front of Chris and Gaia, they were so weak they could afford to totally disregard them.

If she wanted to save Xiaolei, removing those two was after all the fastest method.

In silence, Ayano unsheathed Enraiha. This time not to play or go easy on them.

Faster than it was possible, with the decision to end this with one blow, she raised her power.

She took a step forward. Behind her, th presence of wind swelled so much, enough to overwhelm hers.

A feeling of almost omnipotent confidence gushed out from her chest.

It's impossible to loose. She thought so from the bottom of her heart. If they are together.

But,

"Humph, so you're attacking right away. We're being underestimated. "

The expressions of Chris and Gaia were calm. In spite of seeing the difference in strength yesterday they faced off with a smile of composure.

"Did you thing we came here without a plan? Look at this! "

Together with that elated outcry, Gaia threw a capsule-like object that he took from his pocket.

It suddenly burst open in the air, and a pure white smoke filled the surrounding atmosphere.

And then, when the smoke cleared — a grotesque animal was flapping its wings there.

In short, from a huge eyeball, a pair of bat-like wings were growing. Judging from that molding that wasn't natural and it didn't feel very powerful, there was no doubt it was some kind on Youma.

"Ooh, a Capsule monster, huh? "

"…What's that?"

"Don't worry about it. Well, either way, it's not strong enough that it will become problematic…"

Kazuma's voice that was lightly flowing, was suddenly interrupted. Simultaneously, the presence of

wind she felt from behind was rapidly weakening and then, discomposed.

“Kazuma!? This is—”

In Ayano’s eyes, unintentionally turning around, were reflected Kazuma’s, with a more grim stare than ever.

The wind spirits that were whirling around him were rapidly torn off, as if sucked by something else. The direction of that flow was fixated to that Youma standing like a shield in front of Gaia.

“Wha- what the heck is that? “

Unconcerned about Ayano’s bewilderment, Gaia looked at Kazuma only and sneered.

“Do you understand, youngster? This is a Youma that feeds on wind spirits — it’s called <<Kazebami>> (trad: Wind Eater) “

“Wha—? “

“And— “

Following Gaia, Chris threw in the air the same kind of capsule. With the same exploding sound and white smoke— but the thing that appeared from there was a thick mist with a red phosphorescence twinkling inside.

It was an amorphous Youma, it's body without real form.

Including a sneer, Chris declared.

"This is <<Homranagi>> (trad: Blaze Lull). I don't have to explain what it does, right? "

"Kuu— "

Ayano let out a murmur full of worry.

Something like that was self-explanatory. Together with Homranagi's appearance, the fire spirits were absorbed with great force — and they were eaten.

Even the flame cladding Enraiha became very small.

She didn't turn completely powerless but her offensive ability went down to twenty of thirty percent.

That wouldn't be so bad if they were small fry for becoming the opponents of those carrying Sacred Treasures, it was considerably unreliable.

"This is bad", murmured Ayano inside her heart.

It was an almost perfect trap. Most of their power was snatched away and in contrast, the opponent had no limitation, freely able to exercise all his power.

That war potential ratio was perfectly reversed and even more, a hopeless gap was opened between them.

She recalled Kazuma's words from yesterday.

" As long as they don't have some huge hidden trick, they're at a level me and Ayano can deal with"

And this was a huge, gigantic hidden trick. Even where Kazuma was concerned, they greatly sealed his power—

"Can I ask one thing? "

Suddenly, that voice could be heard. Looking at him, facing the triumphant enemies, Kazuma asked in a quiet voice.

"Leaving aside the issue of where you took those things from, you are Spirit Practitioners, right? Even if it's another kind, not the ones you associate with, don't you hesitate to let the spirits be eaten by Youma? "

For a moment Gaia didn't seem to understand what he was saying so he stared in wonder but immediately turning his whole face into a sneer, he declared loudly.

"I wondered what you were going to say— how idiotic. You son of a bitch, do you think *The spirits are our*

friends, our important partners! ? What an idiot! The spirits are similar with tools, why would I consider their feelings? “

“Aaah, I understand. That’s enough. “

“That’s why, we cannot talk with the likes of you, belonging to the old clans! You are tied to things like tradition or convention and don’t want to accept the changes and progress of a new era! The fact that such people possess Sacred Treasures is like pearls thrown before the swine! Quietly hand it over to me, I can use it more— “

“I told you to shut up”

“wha—? “

Interrupting Gaia’s statement, shouting his justice in a loud voice, similar to murmur, were Kazuma’s quiet words.

That voice with an inferior volume was loaded with something that not only made Gaia shut his mouth, but warped his bearded face in terror, making him take a step back.

But, that was only for a moment. Realizing he backed down, this time he laughed happily, barring his teeth.

“Ha, ha ha — even in front of this adversity you give off so much <<Ki>> to overwhelm me. — that’s fine. I have waited to fight with someone as strong as you! “

Gaia got excited. But, without following on that tension, Kazuma informed Ayano matter-of-fact.

“We’re changing opponents. I’ll do the Suijutsushi. “

“Ah, yes. “

“I won’t let you! “

Just at the moment they were about to execute that reasonable plan, Gaia trampled the ground with his short legs.

Immediately following, as if a giant cut open the ground, enormous fissures were produced on the ground.

The cracks spread at a too large scale to be an instant jutsu, it was obviously prepared before hand.

In the end, even for Kazuma and Ayano who didn’t hear the message, when thinking why did they picked a fight at this place, before they managed to find the answer, the cracks on the ground spread even more, separating them.

“—che”

Kazuma smacked his lips. The gap made by the ground crack was a little more that ten meters. It wasn't he could normally jump over without problems but right not there was Kazebami.

The likelihood of him falling to his death if the wind spirits would be eaten in the middle of the jump was high so he couldn't behave recklessly.

"—Let's see"

Like a cat teases a mouse, a voice full of composure reached his ears. Turning around, as expected, there was the short man resembling a dwarf, bearing a huge battle-axe on his shoulder.

While the Kazebami was flapping his winds above him.

"…"

Kazuma ignored Gaia, shifting his attention on the other side of the crack.

At that place he couldn't reach now, Ayano and Chris were standing, the battle having already begun.

It was clear even at that distance that Ayano was being pressed down.

He turned to Gaia once more. He was standing still like before, waiting for Kazuma to prepare for battle.

No way, while tricking them with this plan, he's not going to say right now: *"I won't behave so cowardly as to attack you by surprise"*?

"Are you prepared? "

Kazuma replied with a light shoulder shrug at that question oozing with joy.

"No, please wait for three more hours. I am busy right now. "

"Don't prattle, youngster! "

Together with an angry roar, Gaia swung the battle-axe— Nozuchi, down.

The axe didn't reach far but the ground it blew up turned to throwing stones, leaping with tremendous velocity.

Kazuma promptly raised a wind barrier. But the spirits he summoned were readily devoured by Kazebami and it didn't acquire enough strength to defend against the stones.

There was no choice but to abandon defence. He jumped to the side as if tumbling and barely managed to avoid it.

"Hey, hey, aren't you the impatient one? "

"No, I'm just glad to be able to kill you"

Kazuma stood in front of Gaia sure of his victory, without hesitating or showing negligence.

He didn't gave up just yet. In this circumstance he was certainly at an overwhelming disadvantage. But that doesn't mean there were no chances of winning.

Kazebami was absorbing the wind spirits but that ability was definitely not infinite.

Therefore, although he couldn't do much his Fujutsu ability couldn't be sealed. Still, he couldn't use his ability.

And because Gaia will definitely not interpose between him and Kazebami, close combat will be difficult.

From what he saw from the fight yesterday, Gaia's pride was the close combat.

More than having the Sacred Treasure, which was a given, more that any jutsu, it was because the one who could mercilessly pummel more had the biggest power.

"which means, Ayano's side is more dangerous"

Chris's Sacred Treasure — that water whip's length could be changed at will.

Which means that even in between Homranagi, he could attack at full power.

If this were the usual Ayano, she could cut off the water whip and shorten the distance but it was unfair to expect something like that of her.

Being attacked one-sided from a distance, there are low chances of being able to overcome the situation as it is.

But, there was nothing they could do about it. Right now even protecting their bodies was dangerous.

Until they found a way to overthrow the currently disadvantageous situation, they had no choice but to endure.

"Be that as it may — what to do?"

The very best method would be to reunite with Ayano without waisting another second.

The current crisis is a crisis precisely because they are separated.

If they could reunite and switch partners, both Kazebami and Homranagi will become something of little importance.

To say nothing of the fact that would be just the freebie.

But the enemy obviously understood that.

That's why, they tried fabricating this circumstance by all means — and that's why they will prevent their coming together by all means possible.

"Ah ah, this became quite troublesome. "

Murmuring so together with a long breath, Kazuma reached for his breast pocket.

He pulled out a dagger. It was simple, without curves. The double edge blade a little less that thirty centimeters was engraved with seven dots in the shape of the Bid Dipper.

It was the blade commonly known as the Sacred Sword of Seven Stars.

It was a famous magic artifact on the continent, that appeared on the market frequently. But even among them, although this wasn't the absolute best, it had a pretty high status.

But.

"Guahahahahahaha! The Sacred Sword of Seven Stars? Do you think you can fight against this Nozuchi with that toy? "

As expected, against a Sacred Treasure, this kind of blade is the same as a bamboo sword.

“No, no matter what, I have no intention of exchanging blows with that rustic axe. “

Vaguely warding off Gaia’s scorn, Kazuma clasped the Seven Star with a backhand grip.

“But well, if it’s against someone of your caliber, I think this is enough. “

“Wow, shall we test that? “

Gaia was readily provoked.

His nature was a very simple one but in circumstance such as these, where he had such an overwhelming advantage, he had enough self-confidence not to loose in spite of the opponent’s calculations.

And then —

“Let’s go! “

Raising a scream from the bottom of his belly, Gaia plunged in a straight line.

“Wha—”

As one would expect, Kazuma was dismayed.

The speed of Gaia’s rush was faster that what those short legs of his could accomplish.

Or rather, he manipulated the ground somehow, or he used some sort of acceleration technique.

But, rather that that trivial question —

"A- are you an idiot? why are choosing close combat in this situation? "

"Hah, because cutting you down from afar isn't really my style! "

The fact that he wrecked all his tactics was the more serious problem.

Without minding Kazuma's bewilderment, Gaia swung down Nozuchi.

Handling his body on the spur of the moment, Kazuma evaded that blow.

He defended against the explosion of earth and sand born from the excessive force with which the ax crashed into the ground with a minimal wind barrier and aimed Seven Star at Gaia's neck.

"Neen!! "

Gaia blocked it by pushing out his right arm. It made a sound as is striking a dull, hard rock.

Looking at it, that arm was completely covered in rock, protecting him like a clumsy glove.

"I told you that thing won't work! "

With a gruff scream, Gaia raised overhead the enormous battle ax with his left arm.

Kazuma safely dodged that and simultaneously hit him with a wind blade.

It was a point-blank blow and the jutsu, appearing faster that what could be absorbed, mangled Gaia's body.

Fresh blood sprouted from dozens lacerations, adorning that body in a crimson aura.

"—Hah! "

But, without worrying about the damage he received, Gaia lively wielded Nozuchi.

"Was that supposed to be an attack? It was lighter than the Fuan's brat! If you sank so low, I don't even feel pity! "

"How noisy! It's none of your business, leave me alone! "

Kazuma strained himself to avoid while spitting out his reply.

Luckily, no matter how much power one had for handling a gigantic, heavy ax-like weapon, the swordsmanship was limited. It wasn't difficult to dodge.

“Why won’t it hit? Aren’t you ashamed to keep running, youngster? “

“That was a tactical retreat”

“It’s the same thing! “

While pretending he had enough composure to crack jokes, Kazuma continued to evade like he was tightrope walking.

It was true he had no other choice, but he had a goal.

Getting impatient with Kazuma’s defensive fight, Gaia was attacking with larger swings. If he could hit there—

“—!!”

Together with a sharp exhalation, he threw the knife so fast his hand was invisible. The aim wasn’t Gaia but Kazebami.

The power of that one blow, expecting a certain kill, loaded with the <<Ki>> of his entire body was match for a rifle.

It’s peculiar ability was being a nuisance but it seem like Kazebami had a meager power in itself and had no way of defending itself against such attacks.

But.

"Kiiiiiiiiiiiii! "

Together with a cry of dissatisfaction, Kazebami shot a beam from its eye.

Its aim was the knife, that evaporated instantly.

"—Che"

"Gahahahaha, such a fool! ", laughed Gaia.

"Did you think absorption it's his only ability? What point is there to absorb power but not be able to use it? With your present offensive ability, you cannot defeat Kazebami. Of course, nor can you defeat me! "

"…"

Kazuma was silent.

Honestly, he was fairly cornered. The chance of defeating Kazebami was very low now.

And just like Gaia said, since he couldn't eliminate it, it was close to impossible defeating him.

He was in a desperate situation.

"This is troublesome…can't Ayano do something…"

While thinking such pathetic things, Kazuma hanged his hopes on Ayano who was fighting at a distant location.

Part 2

"Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha, what's the matter? Is that all? "

Ayano intercepted that water blow fired at her together with loud laughter only with Enraiha, all fire extinguished.

But, the difference in power was obvious.

The water whip she was easily able to slice off before was, right now, heavy enough she couldn't stop the blow.

Far from being able to shorten the distance, one by one, she was forced to retreat, attacked one-sided.

"So heavy— "

Faced with that pressure she couldn't compete with, Ayano bit her lips.

To be accurate, it wasn't Chris who became stronger but she who became weaker, strength was relative and such wordplay was meaningless.

Right now, at at this time, Christian Roengram was stronger that Ayano Kannagi.

But, even if she accepted that, the fact that she could do nothing about it doesn't change.

Because Homranagi was constantly in front of Chris, all long distance attacks had been absorbed.

Then, even if she were to plan cutting him directly, Mizuchi's reach was far longer than Enraiha's.

And Ayano right now did not have the necessary strength to break through that distance of several meters, while handling the water whip,

"Missiles became ineffective, I cannot start close combat — winning percentage:zero. QED. Hey, if it's over what am I supposed to do? "

While fruitlessly arguing with herself, Ayano racked her brain, searching for an opening.

But, frankly, she couldn't think of any. She wasn't someone who used tactics very well from the beginning.

Whether it was impossible or next to impossible, she had no choice but to do it.

"Well, if I'm stalling long enough, Kazuma might figure something out. "

But, that wasn't trust, it was only dependence — dependence on others.

She could not permit that, her pride wouldn't tolerate it anymore.

The position Ayano desired was to be Kazuma's partner, in no way the object of his protection.

"— Well then"

With that murmur, Ayano concentrated her consciousness.

On that water whip hammering into her as it pleased, its trajectory, timing, framework combination, grasping it completely, she searched for a gap to dive in.

That's right, there's nothing to think about it.

If a long-distance attack is *theoretically impossible*, if bringing it into close-combat is *exceedingly difficult* — in terms of degree of difficulty, it's still one rank lower.

If that's the case, the selected route will always be the same.

Or perhaps, there was no choice from the beginning.

She must slip through the offense no matter what it takes and plunge deeply enough until the sword can reach him.

"Haah! "

Together with that scream, Ayano powerfully kicked the ground.

At the same time Mizuchi attacked but she barely managed to ward it off without killing the force of her rush.

"With this…will I make it? "

The speed of that whip's pointed end masterly manipulated, exceeded the speed of sound.

But, what could be called the blessing in disguise was that Chris was a first-class whip handler, not a Suijutsushi one.

It was very fast she could barely confirm it by sigh.

"How foolish! Does this mean you still don't understand the difference in strength? "

"I know it, all right! "

Replying scornfully while bouncing back the attack, Ayano took one more step.

That's right, it was very clear there is a huge power difference. But, that has nothing to do with it.

If something you cannot surrender is taken, if you cannot protect without waging war, no matter how low the chance of victory is, there is no choice but to fight.

There is nothing more but that.

"Haaaaaaaah! "

"Kuuh…do- don't get carried away! "

Irritated at Ayano's *pointless resistance*, Chris attacked incessantly, much more severe.

But, the girl started to notice handling his attacks became easy to her.

While drawing near the range, because managing the long whip became difficult, Chris gradually shortened the whip.

For Ayano, who already started being able to see through his technique, it didn't take time to deal with those attack with dropping speed.

At the same time Ayano made the judgment that the Justushi called Chris, although powerful, in the end he wasn't all that much.

Meaning that he had already thoroughly demonstrated his power, its range — to put it bluntly, when facing a weaker enemy, when facing an equal enemy, when facing a stronger enemy, his impatience will surface, his technique will get rough.

Right now was exactly that time. Ayano already detected many lethal chinks in Chris' armor.

The fist few times she was cautious wondering if it's not a fake but now it was already clear

"That's right— swing— restore— there! "

Completely stealing Chris' trick, at the same time she grasped the behavior of preparing at attack she jumped in a big way.

While feeling Mizuchi's attack cold on her neck, location she decided to land was roughly two meters in front Chris.

"Wha- "

—Completely within Enraiha's killing range!

"I got through! "

"Kuuh! "

Chris's face, that became gradually stiffer, finally had a cramp.

While memorizing that expression feeling more that a little exhilarated, Ayano raised Enraiha to kill.

"I- I won't let you! "

Chris stopped the blow with Mizuchi, setting Humranagi free overhead in a hurry.

Enraiha lost most of her power but, that does not mean the blade grew dull.

The fear of being cut by it was second to none.

"Girl…don't underestimate me! ", shouted Chris as if denying his impatience and agitation.

"Do you think the situation turned around with just this? But, everything remains the same!"

"True", Ayano readily affirmed.

Practically, she approached close enough for her sword to reach but at the same time she was also the closest to Homranagi.

Ayano's ability as an Enjutsushi was almost perfectly sealed. Even Enraiha's flame was practically extinct, only the air sourronding the blade was vaguely simmering like a heat haze, unable to change to flame.

Meaning, Ayano could challenge the powerful Suijutsushi owning a Sacred Treasure with nothing but martial arts.

But, there wasn't a particle of cowardice in Ayano's pupils.

In this situation she was at a disadvantage, overwhelmingly so. But, expressing that in another words, that was only a handicap.

Compared with the time she had no choice but continue to receive a one-sided attack unable to counter-attack, the situation improved a hundred-fold.

"Haah! "

Ayano swung Enraiha without hesitation.

Even if she lost her power, she believed in the blade that was the Clan's most important asset, the blade that was half of her being.

"Huff! Too soft!"

Chris stopped the slash with the water edge.

He reaffirmed his own advantage, returning to the affected expression from his first appearance.

"Is an Enjutsushi unable to use fire challenging me? Realize your standing! "

Thrusting away with brute force the sword on sword lock, Chris swung his arm, as if gently brushing the air.

Doing so, an infinite number of water droplets were produced and a second later, were shot with fierce speed.

"—!! "

Ayano evaded the rain of water bullets concentrating from her breasts to her head by rolling on the ground.

And then, immediately making her body take a defensive position, she fired a blow using the blade while standing up.

"As expected, he's— slow"

While slashing at him one after another without giving him the time to use Suijutsu, the girl's assessment about Chris was reevaluated once more.

He was definitely not weak and he didn't look stupid.

Even the attack just now was almost the best selection.

Since Ayano lost her Enjutsu ability, she could only oppose Mizuchi with Enraiha itself. Then, there was no need to fuss over bestowing the most powerful attack by means of the Sacred Treasure.

It was rather the other way around, the best plan was to bother and overwhelm him so that he can handle only Enraiha.

In a fight between Sacred Treasure users, even tricks that were nothing more but skillful feints, could turn now into deadly blows.

But, if you are trying to use such a shotgun technique, it's a mistake to try and hit everything.

The aim should be scattered over a vast rage and little by little but steadily pile up damage.

"Kuuh…you bitch…why are you still alive? "

This man didn't understand that.

Because he only fought with weaklings only and didn't have the experience of struggling to the last minute against someone strong, he never schemed to get even one millimeter closer to victory.

"I can't possibly loose against someone like that! "

Enveloped with the drive of certain victory, Ayano swung Enraiha downward.

Yet again, Chris smashed Mizuchi, the blade not the whip, because the distance was too small, against it with a frantic expression.

"Kuuh! "

While they clashed, his posture crumbled.

Ayano, who overpowered the opponent for the first time today, drove all that force into the strike.

Chris wasn't able to reorganize his stance. Ayano was absolutely sure of victory in front of the enemy full of openings.

But.

There was one thing Ayano forgot. The Youma who stole the fire from her — the existence of Humranagi.

Just like Kazuma, Ayano was also under the impression eating fire spirits was its only ability so she discarded its presence from her awareness.

Different from Kazuma, it was a blunder risen from arbitrarily deciding from the beginning she couldn't skillfully destroy Homranagi.

While swinging Enraiha downward, fleetingly glancing at the sky, a red light was projected closely in her field of vision.

And then she was astonished.

That annoying Homranagi was making that shining something in the middle of the mist brighten much strongly and— she didn't understand where its eyes were but— it was looking here.

The next moment, from that red something, a deep-crimson beam was fired aiming at Ayano.

Free time to fend it off, time to think, she didn't have any.

"Dieee! "

"Kuh! "

Slamming his elbow in Nozuchi's flank swinging down, Kazuma avoided a fatal blow within a hair's breath.

The huge axe was knocked down on the ground. The pebbles flying around with the force of an explosion, scraped Kazuma's cheek, unable to fend off.

"What's the matter? Your movement is slowing down? "

"…shut it", replied Kazuma groaning.

Gaia stared at his face with doubt,

"Humph, it doesn't seem like you are tired. It's like your heart is not here — do you worry about what happens on the other side? "

"…"

Kazuma was silent. But it was the truth.

Right now, his consciousness was eighty percent turned toward the battle between Ayano and Chris.

Just like it was said, Kazebami's ability was not absolute nor was it inexhaustible.

That's why, outside the scope of it's power, he was able to control wind spirits without question.

Of course, more than a small fluctuation was produced feeling that influence, making the distant control exceedingly difficult and the degree of difficulty jumped through the roof when trying a precise control.

In that situation, having to endure Gaia's fierce attack, Kazuma was constructing an extremely elaborate wind network.

And finally, by constantly concentrating a large part of his consciousness he succeeded in adjusting the environment so that he could perceive the battle between Ayano and Chris in real-time.

Nevertheless, because of Kazebami, that could only happen outside the territory Kazuma and Gaia were fighting.

Inside it, it was still impossible to use Fujutsushi against Gaia and Kazebami, and just like Ayano, he could only fight using martial arts.

No, the battle progress was even worse.

Different from Ayano who converged all her sensitivity in her own battle, looking over Ayano's battle via the tuning with the spirits required most of Kazuma's concentration.

As expected Gaia was proving difficult to face with only that remainder.

Excepting Nozuchi, he managed somehow the Chijutsu attacks but it became clear that in the future he would fail

But, even so…

“Humph! “

“Kuuh! “

His reaction was late. At once he set up the Seven Sword diagonally and ward it off but just by that one conjunction a huge crack was made on the blade.

At this rate, if it were to happen three more times, the blade would snap.

Of course, if he were to stop the blow head-on, it would instantly be pulverized.

Obviously together with its owner.

“Fuu, that toy is pretty durable”

Gaia offered words of praise from the bottom of his heart.

In a situation so disadvantageous, being cornered so much but never once receiving a direct hit, that strength was comfortable.

Being able to cross swords with such a formidable enemy to one’s heart’s content, that pleasant feeling was satiating.

But, on Kazuma’s side,

“Keh— Ayano, don’t be so reckless”

Seeming not to hear Gaia's words, turning away, he muttered to himself.

Between **here** and **there**, it was very clear which one was more important.

Naturally, Gaia was enraged.

"You bastard! Is the woman more important than fighting me!? Are you underestimating me— "

"It doesn't mean that I underestimate you but it can't be helped, you know? More that killing you, right now the person there has more priority "

"You dare? "

At present, there is no other way of winning

There will probably be just one chance.

In the current situation, if he's cautious, the accuracy rate will drop very low.

That's right — for Kazuma, there was something more important than killing Gaia.

It is, defeating both Gaia and Chris.

For that to happen, this overwhelming disadvantage must be improved one way or another, no matter what. And that's something he does not wish for Ayano.

Even if there is a huge risk that will come with it, there was no other way but to go through with this.

"I'm relying on you, Ayano"

Unintentionally he spoke out loud his expectation. But from what he saw, that didn't seem an issue.

Even in this disadvantageous situation, Ayano is making good progress.

It seemed she could win by herself without any help.

That was partially because that Suijutsushi was a loser but even so it was a big deal.

"What remains is to find an opportunity here by any means possible— "

As expected he kept quiet this time, murmuring so inside his heart. That's when it happened.

On his other field of vision a non-laughing matter was projected.

Ayano about to cut down Chris. The Homranagi creeping overhead. The red light inside the mist increased its brightness, clearly preparing to attack.

Ayano was completely unguarded against Homranagi and completely didn't realize it was drawing near.

"—you idiot! "

That instant, Kazuma forgot about Gaia's existence. He completely discarded his own battle from consciousness concentrating everything on the neighboring battle.

Tuning his sense with the wind spirits, he aimed precisely at Homranagi ignoring the distance or Kazebami's influence.

He felt a definite response.

He was relived.

All of it happened in one moment.

But of course, Gaia didn't miss that space.

"Nun! "

Raising a scream filled with power, Gaia swung Nozuchi downward.

The blade blew up the ground like an explosion — it hardened in the air and the crystal-like stones bullets aimed at Kazuma.

He couldn't react in any way. His absolutely defenseless upright body was flooded in the stream of bullets, dancing in space as if hit by a car.

The Seven Star he had in his right hand snapped disappearing in the sky.

And then, after flying a few meters, he landed on his back.

With a start, his body convulsed once,

"Gaaa…ahhhh"

Together with a feeble groan, he spit out fresh blood. And then completely stopped moving as if he was dead.

His chest was moving up and down faintly so he barely managed to live but—

"What a moron…!"

No power to fight remained in that body for which even the label serious condition was an understatement.

Gaia's face, looking down on the fallen Kazuma was thoroughly disgusted, warped with discontent.

"Giving up on the fight for something like a woman…I did not wish for such a dull conclusion"

"Haa…I believe I already won, you fool"

"Mmm!? "

He thought he was speaking to himself. The moment he heard that murmured answer Gaia opened his eyes in shock.

He looked down once more and saw the severely wounded person that was about to die there, carrying a strong will in his eyes looking this way.

“I destroyed Homranagi. Ayano will immediately finish off the Suijutsushi and come here. It’s your loss. “

“Humph, giving your life for the woman— for the victory of your partner? What a beautiful intent of self-sacrifice. “

“Don’t be ridiculous! Who died? “

Although in a situation that crossed from an overwhelming to an absolute handicap, Kazuma smiled fearlessly.

“This kind of damage is just the right handicap to deal with the likes of you. Even if I can’t win I can hold on until Ayano gets here easily”

“—Hou? “

Gaia’s expression looking at him with a bored, disappointed look became animated once more.

He realized that Kazuma was not joking but he seriously did not gave up on the fight.

“With a body that cannot stand up, are you still talking big? Interesting, how very interesting, Yagami Kazuma. That’s my opponent! “

“…”

“Fine, then I won’t go easy on you! If you can still do something in that condition, why don’t you show me? “

To grasp complete victory, Gaia raised Nozuchi overhead and roared loudly.

Part 3

Chris couldn't comprehend what happened.

"Wha- what…"

He thought he won completely. It was a perfect trap.

Easily defeating him in the previous battle, looking down on him with naked contempt, that hateful woman he could endlessly torture to death without ever getting tired of it— Kannagi Ayano was one-sided cornered, pressed down and in the end she was supposed to receive a certain-kill blow.

And yet—

"What the fuck happened…"

Homuranagi disappeared.

For Chris, whose power was much inferior to Ayano's, his lifeline just disappeared.

Chris didn't think it was cowardly sealing Enjutsu by using Homuranagi. It was his pet theory that's how humans should fight.

From the start, among all animals on the Earth, it was easier to count a human's physical ability from the bottom up.

No matter how much one trains, there wasn't one in a million people who could bring down a tiger or a lion with his body alone.

Why did such a meager living thing seized hegemony on this planet?

That was only because it had the wisdom to press down that power.

He cannot win by himself. By himself.

By using tools, by setting traps, by thinking of a plan — using such intellectual means, the humans exterminated other animals and expanded their territory.

Then, there was nothing wrong with using a Youma. It was an ordinary tactic to seal the opponent's power.

That wasn't an excuse, he thought so from the bottom of his heart. Of course, it something like that were to happen to him, that would be a different problem.

Anyway, that's how he fulfilled his own self-justification and dealt with this battle as if the winner was decided from the beginning.

"This is, no way…"

The plan that was supposed to be absolute was really, quickly overturned.

Even Chris really understood from the beginning. That the downpour of wind blades from the sky forcibly smashed Homuranagi together with the beam it fired.

"no way…"

But even so he could not accept the reality, letting his gaze wander searching for Homuranagi.

Of course, he couldn't find it, that wandering off gaze directly grasping the appearance of the enemy with it's power regained.

"Hii—!"

Remembering this was no time to be leisurely distracted, Chris jumped setting up Mizuchi.

But, the severe counterattack he feared didn't come.

Even when he put himself on guard, Ayano let the hand grasping Enraiha drop without posture and quietly stopped.

Even Enraiha's blade clad on flame was flickering feebly, not all that different from before Homuranagi was extinguished.

For some reason he hesitated to challenge that somewhat dejected standing figure full of disappointment, feeling like a deer in the headlights.

After several seconds without change—

"Haaah"

Suddenly Ayano closed her eyes, letting out a very heavy sight.

She instantly opened her closed eyelids but in them there was the same battered light of despair.

By some chance, had all fire spirits been eaten as far as the eye can see and even if Homuranagi was destroyed, she wasn't able to regain her power?

When he was thinking that—

"I was supposed to fix the problem by myself, hey. Well, it's true this was a pinch so I won't say it was none of your business. ", grumbled Ayano looking reluctant.

"I'm always the one saved. If it goes on like this, no matter how much time passes, I won't be able to stand next to him. "

"Wh- what are you saying…"

"But, anyway— if that's the case, at least let me handle what was asked of me"

With that murmur, that instant she lightly raised Enraiha overhead—

Donnn—

Together with a thunderous roar that shook the ground, a dazzling pillar of fire pressed against the heaven.

The overwhelming power emerging without previous notice rumbled the surrounding atmosphere—no, the space itself.

"Wha- wha— whaaat!? "

In front of that excessively immense, immense power, Chris could do nothing but raise a cry of panic.

But of course, that was meaningless and before the man screaming idly, a huge pillar of fire converged.

That's right, without reduction or decline it converged. Without lowering it's temperature, only diminishing it's volume, it's density was raised much more.

So much, that it could pierce the Heavens.

The huge blazing column of fire became thiner, shorter— standing in the center of it, entwined in it was the girl's body, the source of the flame.

And finally, it was compressed in that blade the girl was holding.

"Waah"

Chris stared with a hot blooded complexion at that blade clad in a compressed flame the equivalent of a sun.

His teeth didn't quite match, an unsightly chattering sound escaping from his mouth.

Unable to look straight at her, his turned away eyes sized his own hand holding Mizuchi.

It was supposed to have given him unrivaled power, the mighty, unparalleled **Water's Sacred Treasure**.

It was the first time he regarded it as something so unreliable. Bearing in mind the differences between water and fire, the disparity between them became overwhelming.

It's impossible to win— that was such a reasonable conclusion it became heartless.

Using Enraiha to slice the air ahead, Ayano looked at Chris through the golden sparks scattered.

With an expression void of the exaltation of the counterattack, void of the pleasure of taking her revenge, she dispassionately announced.

"I'm sorry but I can't mind you right now"

She already had no business here.

She must speedily clear all obstacles blocking her path, she must go no matter what.

"Because Kazuma is waiting for me"

Even if this is Kazuma, Ayano understood he had no way of overwhelming Gaia as long as his power was sealed.

He was more that at a disadvantage.

Even under such life threatening circumstances, even so, Kazuma forcefully saved her.

But Ayano understood that wasn't all because of kindness.

It was a move Kazuma made to win.

It was because he judged that was the very best in order to defeat Chris and Gaia.

He saved Ayano and returned her power to her.

That is, *"Kill him quickly, come and quickly smash Kazebami! "*.

"Haaa! "

Reducing the distance by breaking into great speed, Ayano swung Enraiha downward right in front.

"Nuuh! "

Chris spread a water sphere from Mizuchi and held it aloft like a shied to receive the attack.

The difference in shape between a sword or a whip was instantly blurred but the result was still the same.

The enormous water mass was bisected unable to resist a moment. Of course that produced an explosion of water vapor but it was thoroughly burned to nothing by the golden eruption approaching Chris.

"Hi, hiii! "

Without shame or honor Chris rolled on the ground to avoid even brushing against that hellish fire about to annihilate him.

He pushed before his eyes Mizuchi who already became a handle and managed somehow to block down that mowing attack.

This time, something both fortunate and unfortunate happened to Chris.

The fortunate part was that because of Enraiha's flame, condensed to utmost limit, his hand holding the handle wasn't burned away.

The unfortunate part was that because of Enraiha's flame, condensed to utmost limit, the handle struck by it couldn't withstand it.

Even though it was sacred treasure, having lost all its capacity, Enraiha's blow at full power put an enormous burden on it.

Mid-way on the edge of the handle where it was hit, it developed a small crack impossible to mistake.

"Wha—?"

"Eeh? "

Not only Chris but Ayano too looked at it in shock. She slashed at it with all her strength but she would have never expected something called a Sacred Treasure to be damageable.

Unintentionally she interrupted her pursuit and looked at Enraiha.

She observed it carefully and deliberately but it didn't seem to have any minute scratches, let alone cracks.

Letting out a long sigh of relief, she shifted her attention on Chris for a second time.

Because of too much shock she let herself have a lot of openings in front of the enemy but he didn't use that.

Looking at it, it seemed unlikely he could have.

"Aah…aah…"

With perfectly round eyes Chris was starring at Mizuchi.

The crack running through the handle was spreading out greatly but it wasn't serious enough to snap in the middle.

But, that doesn't mean he could relax—

"Waaah! "

Suddenly, from Mizuchi a water whip vigorously stretched out. It stuck to Chris, his upper body reflexively vent backwards.

No matter how you look it he wasn't the kind of man who would commit suicide. Which means that the water whip was naturally formed by the Sacred Treasure.

But, even it that was so, it was clearly strange that it would turn against its proprietor, trying to harm him. It didn't look like a normal feature.

"No way, it's running wild…? Because of a crack…?"

While the water whip was undulating irregularly, it grew thick enough the name whip became unsuitable.

And at the same time, it's pointed tip began changing shape, making one believe it was the head of a liv-

ing creature, furthermore on all its body a scale pattern began to emerge.

"Qu-quiet down, *Mizuchi*! ", order Chris holding the Sacred Treasure in his hand changing his facial expression.

Since his own Sacred Treasure was on a rampage that reaction wasn't particularly odd but Ayano tilted her head on the side remembering a subtle sense of discomfort.

"This pronunciation…is somewhat weird?"

Mizuchi is certainly the name of the Sacred Treasure he was owning. But the way he called it then, it seemed like he called out something quite different but with the same name—

"Well, anyway"

It was doubtful but Ayano easily cast it away.

She was hurrying now and at present the enemy must be put down no matter what.

If so, there's only one way to go.

In silence she raised Enraiha overhead. Since the Sacred Treasure was running wild close combat became even more dangerous. Besides, there was no need for a direct confrontation in this situation.

But even so, without negligence, she loaded all her power in the blade.

And then, she swung it downward without hesitation.

A maximum plasma attacked the Suijutsushi in the height of his panic.

"Hiiiyaa! "

Without means of opposing, he wasn't even able to control Mizuchi. Having said that, he didn't have the determination to let go of it and it was too late to run now—

The result

Unable to do anything, Chris was wrapped in the white-hot flame.

After the flame vanished, nothing remained. Not Chris nor Mizuchi.

Unable to earn a positive proof, Ayano murmured.

"Did I got him…?"

Since there was any trace there was also a chance he ran away. Leaving Chris aside, she didn't believe the Sacred Treasure called Mizuchi could disappear without leaving at least a fragment behind.

But right now, more that the validation of the result, she gave preference to the confluence with Kazuma.

Thinking so, Ayano turned on her heels and started running searching in the cracks for a path to the other side.

“Wait for me, Kazuma! “

Part 4

Managing somehow to get up, leaning on one of the tree trunks nearby, Kazuma urged Gaia provocatively.

"What's the matter, aren't you coming? "

"How about you speak so full of composure after you can stand up by yourself? "

"Against you, even standing down it's enough."

Together with the instant reply, Kazuma lifted his middle finger. But, Gaia didn't get angry, rather he was laughing happily.

"You didn't give on victory even this late in the game. I understand that. Bastard, are you still planing something? Not something that could change the tables in a second but something that could open you a path to victory? "

"That's right. If you don't want to die, don't move any closer. I can solve the problem with a long range attack without risking my safety. "

It was clearly a provocation. Using the things Gaia put a lot on emphasis on, pride and courage, he wanted to get him as close as possible.

But he was doing it deliberately, stepping up the provocations.

“Fine. Then I’ll cut your head directly with this Mizuchi. “

And then, he bore Nozuchi on his shoulder and slowly started walking with his short legs.

“Kuuh…fu fu…fu fu fu fu fu fu…”

While firmly taking one step at the time, a suppressed laugh escaped Gaia, enjoyed from the bottom of his heart.

“Not being exhausted even after being corned to such an extent…On the contrary, it’s like I’m the one whose being cornered. This tension and this feeling of exaltation— it’s fun, Yagami Kazuma. I feel like I have only been alive since I met you “

“…that so? “

Contrastive to Gaia who displayed a somewhat ecstatic facial expression, Kazuma was thoroughly awake.

“By the way, they’re something I want to ask you”

“What is it?”

Looking at Kazebami Kazuma asked.

"If you love to fight, why are you using something like that? "

"Hmmm, it's regrettable but I cannot win otherwise. "

"…In short, what you like is not *to fight* but *to win*, right? "

"If I'd be pushed to say it, that's right. If I were to die, I couldn't fight anymore, right? "

"…"

At that thought too distant from his own sense of values, Kazuma understood asking question is meaningless.

"It was a mistake thinking I can understand a battle junkie's mind. "

"What are you saying? Living is fighting. Then, there's no other meaning to life except aiming for victory. "

"Aah, I see, I see. That so? "

Gaia passionately began reciting his life philosophy but Kazuma, who already gave up understanding him, only made approving sounds not really listening.

It seems that these two had a very bad affinity.

But, it was only a conversation while walking and that distance wasn't all that long. Naturally, it quickly came to an end.

"What's the matter? "

There were a little less that two meters. Stopping at a distance were, if he were to make another step the ax would reach, Gaia asked:

"You're already within my reach. Won't you use that *plan* that will definitely kill me? "

"Humph, I'm embarrassed", replied Kazuma in an absolutely not embarrassed tone while expressing a slack smile.

But the situation was desperate even for untrained eyes. Ayano was still in the middle of fighting with Chris and she will certainly not make it in time.

In this situation where he didn't have strength enough to stand, is it really possible to defeat Gaia even with a plan.

"Unfortunately I couldn't prepare yet. Therefore, because of my handicap wait until I count to three. "

Saying so, he raised two fingers. As expected, Gaia frowned.

"There's no need to go along with you that far. This is enough, not knowing when to give up— "

"One"

But, not minding that, Kazuma willfully started the count. The ring finger standing up was folded.

Gaia frowned even more.

"I told you I won't go along with it. Fine, then just before it reaches three, I'll behead you"

"Two"

The middle finger was folded.

Immediately following, in silence Gaia took the last step. At the same time he twisted his back, creating enough space for Nozuchi hidden on his back.

A sweeping sideways slashing attack that would cut off his neck in one move.

That flash aimed for Kazuma's head much faster than when his finger should have folded.

But, even quicker that that—

Suddenly, Kazebami was enveloped in flames.

"Wha—!?"

At the sudden emergency Gaia interrupted his attack looking up at Kazebami. But, without time to do

anything, the golden flame shining brilliantly burned Kazebami no nothing instantly.

The Youma that was the vital point of his tactics quickly disappeared without leaving any trace.

“No way, she’s still…”

Murmuring in blank amazement, Gaia gasped sharply, looking back at Kazuma.

That frightful gaze was was greeted with with a man-eating smile.

“Aah, I’m sorry. That was a bit fast, no? “

“Bastaaaaar—”

Gaia was about to curse at him but didn’t manage to finish his words.

Wind blew him off like a cannonball, flowing away ten meters.

Kazuma didn’t run after him, looking up at the sky deploring. Next he looked over his shoulder and laughed cynically.

“You made a very grand entrance but did you wait your turn, old man? “

“Don’t be foolish. I’m not you”

A solemn voice replied so. Abruptly he faced the one who addressed him without any surprise. And then—

“Nii-sama! “

Obviously different from the previous one, a high clear voice that made one’s ears comfortable and small footsteps running over.

Kazuma greeted his important family member with a bottomless smile, unusual for him.

“Yo, Ren”

“Onii-sama! “

Kazuma’s real brother, Kannagi’s direct descendant, the Enjutsushi Kannagi Ren responded to his brother smiling with his whole face.

And then he prepared to hug him with all his strength but the instant he saw Kazuma’s condition he froze.

“…Nii-sama…”

That third call was sorrowful, as if a different person called the first two times.

But Kazuma didn't seem to notice,

"Aah, you'd better not cling to me. Because my bones are broken here and there"

In a tone as if speaking about a different person, he urged Ren to be careful.

"…What on Earth happened for Nii-sama to receive so much damage? "

"Humph, you probably got excited and became negligent in the end and received a severe counter-flow, right? "

That profound voice answered Ren from the background. The boy turned around, and replied to their father, Kannagi Genma, in a tone full of criticism.

"You don't need to speak in that tone, Otou-sama"

"But, Kazuma is actually injured. Was the man just now so dangerous? That's impossible "

"Otou-sama— "

"Ren, wait"

Kazuma restrained Ren, who was about to protest further. Of couse, it wasn't to prevent the parent-child argument.

"You, how did you know about this? "

It was because he wanted to know the answer first. Ren and Genma who had just returned from a business trip had no way of knowing they were fighting here.

But Ren quickly answered.

"How you ask, because Isurughi-san from the Special Investigation Unit reported to the Suzerain. "

"Isurughi…? Aah, that child-face. What did he report? "

"Eeh, that he had a verbal message from those who aimed at Enraiha? Do you not know of it? Then, Nii-sama, why are you here? "

"We chased after Xiaolei and it turned into a fight. Verbal message…by the way, did the Suijutsushi son of a bitch said something about it? "

Both inclined their hear. Because their intel was too different, they couldn't understand the situation very well.

Eventually, Kazuma gave up on it completely.

"Anyway. We'll have time to talk things through when this is over. "

And finally he looked at his father and spoke words of thanks, unusually frank.

"At any rate you saved me. That was a desperate situation"

"Hoou— I didn't notice that"

Genma replied coldly and shifted his focus underneath to where Kazebami had been flying.

A darkened stick-like object was stuck into the ground. Because it had been burned at such high temperature, it fused and wouldn't return to its previous form but even so the seven dots carved in the middle could still be seen.

That was supposed to have been blown away at the time he received that blow from Gaia, the ruin of the Seven Star Sword. Ht means that when Genma attacked Kazebami he also burned the sword that was still there.

Of course, it wasn't a coincidence. Using wind Kazuma manipulated the sword's orbit, using words Kazuma controlled the positions of Gaia and Kazebami and turned the situation around in a surprise attack against the danger that stole his skill from the blind spot.

The resuscitating move born from not knowing how to give up on victory even in the end.

The outcome was pointless but until Genma and Ren appeared it was definitely not impossible recovering in that situation.

But, Kazuma was modest.

"Is that true? Even I were to hit it once that method was like leaving at to chance. There was a high possibility it would be off. "

"Humph, I wonder. You always seemed to like playing the shamisen. "

"Hah, are you still holding a grudge? The one getting tricked is the idiot, no?"

Genma looked with a long, blank gaze at his son, speaking so provocatively. That excessively cold atmosphere unbecoming for a father and his son drifted between them.

Ren looked at both of them astonished.

"Nii-sama…Otou-sama too, now it's not the time to do something like this…? "

"Humph, I agree"

Understanding it was pointless asking questions, Genma turned the conversation more practical.

"Ayano seems to be fighting the other way but where is the Fuan girl? "

"Who knows. Somewhere around there she's dead or she's about to die"

"Nii-sama…"

Ren again raised a voice of criticism against his brother's extremely heartless manner of speaking but this time Kazuma didn't back down.

"Running ahead by herself, defeated on her own. Very troublesome"

"But the Suzerain ordered us to protect that girl."

"That so? Then find her by yourselves. But, before that "

Gaia shifted his attention on Gaia laying down ten meters ahead of him.

The blow from before, although it was meant to thrust him away not incapacitate, it gave enough damage to compare it to an iron ball used for wrecking houses.

"I need to finish this first"

Together with his murmur, Kazuma formed a wind blade above Gaia. And fired it instantly without hesitating.

The wind blade that fell perpendicularly mercilessly aimed at Gaia's neck.

"Nuuoo!?"

But just before it hit, Gaia tumbled on the ground raising a strange voice and narrowly escaped death.

"Did- did you found out…"

"Obviously, you smurf. A Chijutsushi can't die just because of that"

Because the high-ranking Chijutsushi was directly taking the Earth's <<Ki>> inside its body he could boast about resilience beyond human understanding.

Therefore, even receiving damage that would instantly kill a regular human he would still be alive and kicking, just like that.

"Even so, this time playing dead, huh? Even though you say you are a *brave-ish* man, you don't really choose your methods. No, that only means you're self-centered. "

"Mmm, what are you saying? My body and heart are that of a brave man. But—"

"If you die you can't fight anymore? "

"Yeah! ", declared Gaia trowing out his chest with pride.

Clearly the means and the purpose suddenly reversed but the person in question didn't quite understand that.

"…Well, I don't care about your principles but there's something I want to hear. Will you sing for me, I wonder—on whose order are you two operating? "

That moment Gaia's face convulsed magnificently. He was the kind of man who could not lie.

"…I don't know what you're saying"

He was doing his best to play innocent but Kazuma didn't even pay attention.

"Don't try to deceive me, fool. A battle enthusiast meat-head asshole who is convinced he's so clever. Different from trying to make a name for yourself, to say nothing of the fact you managed to prepare that kind of Youma, it doesn't seem like the magic ceremony of gathering four Sacred Treasures is something you just ran across into"

"Unh…"

Gaia groaned unpleasantly but suddenly his lips turned into a broad grin. And then, he began talking.

"Is not that I can't tell you but it's not free of charge. "

“What will money do to you now? You can’t use them in the next world. “

“But—but I didn’t say that’s what I need! “

Speedily giving up on that unsuitable round-about speaking style, Gaia asked directly. That was a military-man-like manner.

Matching that, Kazuma replied frankly.

“I see, that’s fine. Die! “

“Whaa—? If- if I die you won’t get your information! “

“That’s not really important”, declared Kazuma flatly.

“I’m not the one carrying a Sacred Treasure. It’s the Kannagi’s and Fuan’s business. “

“But, can you fight with that wound? Wouldn’t it be best to make a deal now for both of us? “

“Hah, how stupid. Why can I not fight in this situation? “

Declaring so matter-of-course, Kazuma looked at his father. And then pointed at Gaia with his arm and said the words he was most fearfull of.

“Go Kannagi Genma! Defeat the enemy of your family! “

"…"

Genma stared at his son who ordered him so in an unnatural narration-like clear tone with an extremely chilly gaze.

And then, after a few seconds, he suddenly turned around and informed Ren.

"There doesn't seem to be any problem on Ayano's end. We should focus on sheltering the Fuan girl. "

"That's right. "

Ren too looked at Kazuma with the same kind of glance his father used and followed him. Without once turning around, they both disappeared.

Gaia saw them off with an amazed expression.

Precisely because he feared Kannagi Genma he took the miserable attitude of playing dead but it turned out he will be able to escape this place somehow.

And yet, should he be happy his plan worked so well?

"…Are they really gone? Even though you have been disinherited isn't that a bit too cold for a real father and child? "

"Hmm, Aaah, that's fine. It was a joke anyway"

"A joke? ", asked Gaia back not understanding why use that word.

But Kazuma didn't answer that,

"It's certainly tiresome and loathsome, I am hurt, but I couldn't agree more. "

He gave the sentence matter-of-fact.

"I, I had no intention from the beginning of leaving cleaning up you to someone else since the beginning! "

That instant, a sublime thirst for blood filled the space.

"Kuuh! "

Feeling a chill, as if a gleaming sword was pushed against the rape of his neck, Gaia— instantly backed off.

In the same posture, sitting down with both his feet stretched out Kazuma couldn't stand up.

He did not called the wind spirits.

But, but even so.

Faced with the intimidating air emitted by that man only sitting down, Gaia experienced personally the proximity of <<Death>>, like never before.

"Guh…nuu…"

But his reason negated that. Saying there's no need to fear some half-dead man with wounds all over his body.

He clasped Nozuchi with both his hands raising it before his eyes. He backed off one step. And then, to encourage himself, he roared.

"Don't babble dead man! No matter how tough you pretend to be, I know you have no more strength to battle! After collapsing so ungainly, you don't have the strength to stand up! "

"Well, that's generally not mistaken"

Kazuma agreed calmly.

"But that's not a problem. I'm not primarily a martial artist. I can kill people without lifting a finger. It doesn't matter if I sit or if I lie down"

"Even me? Without even moving, without Kokusen, do you think you can kill me with only wind? Don't look down on me! "

"I'm not. That's why— "

A calm tone. But, that <<something>> dwelling in it, the premonition of death that put the screws on Gaia's body, changed into something more.

At the same time he understood. Kannagi Genma's choice to leave this place was not because he abandoned his son but because he was certain of his victory.

That was very clear now. Even about to die, even unable to stand, this man is <<the enemy>> that holds a superior power surpassing his own.

"I'll crush you with all my power"

"Daaaaa! "

That's why Gaia went ahead. Amassing power by jumping ahead several steps, he swung Nozuchi from underneath in a scoop up movement.

The blown-up soil approached Kazuma like a tsunami.

Kazuma didn't stir. Just like he said, he didn't move a finger, only calling out the Wind in his thoughts.

The gushing out hard wind crashed violently in the avalanche of earth and rocks, offsetting it.

The rivalry between wind and earth.

Wind — the spectacle of atmospheric flow stopping the violent torrent of stones was aberrant but Gaia observed it with a smile of joy.

That's right, they're struggling for supremacy. No matter the medium, the avatar of death's, that man's power and he.

"I won't, I won't loose! "

Supported by his regained self-confidence and pride, Gaia charged even more power. The surging sea of soil with grown might, little by little pushed into the wind.

But, immediately following—

The wind-blade approaching from behind, quickly and mercilessly looped off his head.

"—Aah?"

The head separated from its torso fell down while rotating. Unable to understand what happened, inside that rotating field, Gaia observed his own body being shred to pieces by wind-blades.

And then, the head fell on the ground with a plop. The last thing that interrupted consciousness perceived was the image of his enemy, the one who defeated him, collapsed and feeble.

But within that unshapely appearance he instantly recognized that pair of eyes shining in a vibrant blue — the downpour of wind blades from overhead tore

his brain to pieces and his consciousness was swallowed in darkness.

"…sigh"

Quite annoyed, Kazuma took a deep breath. Doing so, he seemed to loose his vitality together with the exhalation and the blue, transparent pupils were dyed a dark black.

"Did my time come? "

Murmuring so without strength he took out tobacco from his breast pocket. He put it in his mouth and lit it with the lighter that was luckily safe.

Breathing out the smoke with a sigh, he looked at the sky. Both his arms hanged, seeming to have used all their strength on the cigarette.

That pair of eyes looking at the sky grew somewhat hazy and yet very transparent. As if he finished achieving what he wanted to achieve, like a man who has no more regrets in this world.

Not moving or rather unable to move— Kazuma stood still as if all his power left him.

A heavy silence filled his surroundings.

"…"

Suddenly, holding the tobacco, his lips trembled. The ash that grew long fell on his chest and charred his clothes but without paying attention to it, he let out a small phrase.

Very much like him, much too cynical, mixed with a bitter smile—

"…Isn't this my death flag? "

"Why are you joking like some happy idiot, you? "

A cold retort immediately returned. Kazuma slightly shifted his neck and looked at the girl holding a flame sword in her hand— Ayano.

"Yo, Ayano. Don't you look healthy? "

"…It's all thanks to you. While you have suffered quite a lot. "

"It's all thanks to you"

Hearing Kazuma reply with the same words, Ayano made an extremely guilty face.

"…I'm very sorry"

"I did it because it was necessary"

"But, I wasn't back in time"

"That's true"

"Again. I couldn't do anything"

“If you think so, it must be so”

“I was supposed to bear that injury”

“Is that so?”

“Thank you”

Words of gratitude lost in the sea of self reproach.

But, no matter how small that whisper was, Kazuma couldn’t possibly miss it.

“You are welcome”

Mingling it with a smile, Kazuma responded to the girl who turned his back on him to try and hide her face dyed red.

Chapter 6: Final Chapter

"Come to think of it, did you meet the old man?", said Kazuma, suddenly remembering.

"Old man, huh…Genma-Ojisama? He came?"

"Aah, together with Ren, they abandoned my injured self and went to find Xiaolei."

"Anyway, you probably said something stupid again, so I don't pity you. Leaving that aside, that Gaia…you really did him, huh?"

Shifting her eyes forward, Ayano said so, as if swallowing something bitter.

The opponent was a Chijutsushi, and so to prevent him from resuscitating, he had been shredded so fine it was impossible to distinguish his human form.

All around there was a pool of blood, a spectacle she couldn't look at directly.

Trying to advert her eyes, Ayano looked at Mizuchi lying in a pool of blood. That boorish ax was keeping its original form but—

"It has a lot of cracks, no?"

"Aaa?"

Following Ayano's gaze, Kazuma also noticed the damage Nozuchi received.

Suspicious, his eyes narrowed, suddenly turning to the Enraiha in Ayano's hand.

The renowned Sacred Treasure of Fire had received Kazuma's full powered attacks many times now, but as far as he remembered there was never a scratch on it.

"Mizuchi too", whispered Ayano in a voice for some reason full of anxiety.

"When Enraiha slashed at it, it cracked on top of which it seemed to run wild."

"Fuuh, I don't really get it. Maybe there is a status difference even between Sacred Treasures? By the way, I didn't check, but did you kill the Suijutsushi?"

"Aah—"

At the sudden investigation, Ayano looked away quite uncomfortable. But Kazuma cannot be deceived with only that,

"Did you kill him?"

"Aah—, you see, I thought meeting was more important so I blew him off with one shot, but I didn't confirm it."

"Ho— "

Kazuma stared at Ayano, who trying to explain and excuse herself, with half-open eyes. Completely disregarding the rest of the explanation, he searched the surroundings.

The answer came back instantly.

"Aaah, found him? Why?", murmured Kazuma very curious.

Ayano had the same opinion.

If he survived, he should have escaped from here. He didn't win even when he had so many advantages.

It was plenty obvious he couldn't now. Then why is he still loitering around here?

"If he's still eager it means he's an inborn idiot— well, anyway. Ayano, this way."

Casually, Kazuma pointed in the direction where he felt Chris' presence.

"No, ten centimeters more to the right, yeah, that's good. Hit him horizontally with all your power."

"Eeh…? If you say so, OK"

Ayano fired a plasma ball just like she was told. That bolide of scorching heat mowed down all trees in

its path, evaporating them, plunging forward in a straight line. And then—

"Ghyaaaaaaa!"

The shriek that reverberated with the sound of explosion belonged to one man emerging from the forest.

Covering his face with his left hand, the man approached, staggering.

"—Eeh?"

For one moment Ayano thought she had attacked an unrelated homeless.

His clothes were in tatters. His hair was burned here and there. For some reason he was covering his face with his left hand, and he had no right arm.

"Ho—"

With a sidelong glance at the shaken Ayano, Kazuma murmured full of admiration.

"You're so merciless, you know?"

"—Eeh, then, is that the Suijutsushi?"

"Of course, who else is there?"

"No, because he's too shabby, I thought I attacked a homeless instead."

"You're the one who made him shabby. Or rather, you're kicking a dead man."

"—Aah"

She covered her mind confused but she couldn't take back her words. Uncomfortably she looked at Chris, the glitter in the eye peeking between his fingers, slowly getting closer, one step at the time.

"How dare you"

From between his dry lips, curse words flew out.

"How dare you— How dare you—"

His left hand dropped, tightly grasping Mizuchi. Hence, his exposed face—

"Waah"

"I see. With this you gave a guy like him a fate much worse than death. As expected of Ayano."

"It wasn't on purpose. Or rather, what do you mean by *as expected*?"

Ayano objected with all her power.

She was still a woman, no matter how incomplete, so she understood that kind of pain.

She didn't wish that fate even to her enemies.

"How dare you, to my faaaaaaaace!?"

Squeezing out a scream, Chris glared at Ayano, the right half of his face hideously burned.

And then he brandished Mizuchi. That water whip that went on and on coiled like a living thing.

"How stupid"

But unlike Ayano, who felt guilty, Kazuma's reaction was thoroughly cold.

"I thought you had some plan, but you snapped just because your precious face got burned. In comparison with the difficulties en route, you're like the punchline, huh?"

He said so coldly over his shoulder, about to sever his future anxieties. But, one beat later.

Or rather, one moment earlier, that thing appeared.

"Wha…!"

"…Eeh?"

The moment he saw it, Kazuma's wind blade about to fire dispersed.

Ayano forgot how to breath, stiffening.

Even Chris' frenzy was appeased.

Nothing was said, nothing was done, just by being there, all their attention was pointed at him.

That tremendous presence, resembled what is commonly known as charisma. At least, there were no humans in this world who could ignore it.

It was the same reason that an everlasting beauty or the spectacularly ugly fascinated and attracted the eye.

Considering only the outward appearance, it looked human.

Darkish skin, darkish hair, jet-black pupils — if you discuss only the separate parts, there wan't much to be uncomfortable about.

But that's wrong.

Somewhere much more fundamental was overwhelmingly, desperately wrong.

No matter how bad they get, humans will never reach that.

From the moment it appeared, the wind died down. The flame burning the trees helplessly smoldered; the ground dried and cracked.

The world was dying.

"He, hey…what is this?"

Staring at that which could kill the entire world, Ayano let out a grazed moan.

But really, she understood without asking. For her, a Spirit Practitioner, she could clearly see the main cause that could kill the world— all Spirits attracted to that thing and greedily devoured.

"—I see"

With a ferocious smile, Kazuma looked at it.

"That's why the small fry had Youma that could devour the spirits. This thing was pulling the strings all along."

That's right, they knew of it. As their greatest enemy.

The legends spoke of it— that which eats the world. The poison that produces only ruin.

"I thought you've been destroyed a long time ago— <<Seireikui>> (trad: Spirit/Soul Eater)"

Feeling her heartbeat throbbing, Ayano unconsciously held her chest down.

Just by hearing that name, her body became so frightened. As if the blood flowing in her veins, her genes, remembered the fear of staying in front of her natural enemy at that moment.

But the <<Seireikui>> in question naturally ignored the existence of both Kazuma, whose gaze was full of

hostility and Ayano's bare terror like that of a small animal, and looked at the greatly disfigured Chris.

"What a disgrace, Christian"

"Kuu—"

"I came to see thinking it was over but Gaia was destroyed and you are in such a sorry state. I gave you Wakemi (part of my spirit) so how could you lose to a Spirit Practitioner? — Incomprehensible"

"I am sorry, Goth-sama"

While grinding his teeth in regret, Chris walked in front of <<Seireikui>> — Goth, and knelt.

But he indifferently ignored that and this time shifted his focus on Kazuma and Ayano.

"Spirit Practitioneers, today I'll overlook you for your achievement — defending Wakemi. Until we meet next time, I'll entrust Enraiha and Kokusen to you. You can be thankful."

"Thank you veeery much"

Just like he said, thanking Goth for his tolerance and charity, Kazuma sharpened wind blades. Using everything he could muster now.

"Ayano, match me"

"Eeh, but…"

Ayano was perplexed, under the impression Spirit Jutsu doesn't work on <<Seireikui>> but Kazuma roared at her, no questions asked.

"Listen up and do it!"

"Y-yes!"

At Kazuma's command Ayano instantly forgot her fear. Rapidly increasing the brightness of the flame surrounding Enraiha until it couldn't be looked at directly.

"We don't have any obligation to overlook you too— you made a mistake in the distance, fool!"

Including scorn, Kazuma fired the wind blade. Matching that, Ayano too shot plasma with all her might.

When they fought with Kazebami and Homuranagi, they were too close. Because the space created for the battle was within range of their preying ability, a bold move was necessary to fulfill their objective — gathering a definite number of spirits.

On the other hand, a light attack without aim would be absorbed before reaching without inflicting damage. As a result Spirit Jutsu had absolutely no effect. That's how it was.

But right now the distance between them and Goth was approximately twenty meters. The spirits surrounding Kazuma won't be influenced by <<Seireikui>>.

He can gather as many as he likes and he can attack at full power.

Then, there are enough prospects for victory.

Certainly, the ability to prey on spirits was a threat for Spirit Practitioners but that power is not infinite.

Because if it were so, <<Seireikui>> would have already exhausted the entire world all by himself.

A simultaneous attack from the Contractor and Enraiha's successor cannot be devoured by a finite preying ability, that's what he thought. But—

"Fuuh—"

Smashing everything, the wind and fire that were supposed to destroy him was breathed in Goth's held out palms and disappeared.

"Humph, a delicacy"

As if nothing happened, with words said after finishing a meal, Goth shared his impression. And then, without being elated by success, he looked at Kazuma and Ayano indifferent.

"Do you understand? That it's useless challenging me using Spirit Techniques."

Useless— not that you cannot win but that challenging him itself was futile, that's what Goth haughtily declared.

"Christian, recover Nozuchi"

"—ha"

Obediently Chris swung Mizuchi and took Nozuchi using the water whip.

Confirming that, Goth looked once more at Kazuma and Ayano.

"Until we meet again, learn your standing."

After that conclusion spoken with extreme arrogance, Goth and Chris disappeared together.

He may have been able to find where to if it wasn't very far but right now, Kazuma didn't have enough willpower for it.

And what's more, even if he chased after he had no way of winning.

"By the way Ayano—"

Turning a critical gaze to Ayano who lost her focus after the battle ended, Kazuma said.

"You, you went easy on him"

"Uuu…no, it wasn't on purpose"

Because Magic was the materialization of one's will, even thinking <<Maybe it won't work>> may decrease the power.

In reality, Ayano's last blow was far from Ayano's real power.

"B-but, Kazuma too wasn't serious, no?"

"Because I was hit before. It's hard firing continuously in this condition"

Meaning that the attack on Goth wasn't the best they could do.

That was a light of hope but, but even so—

"…Hey, if we're both serious, can we defeat him?"

"Who knows. I don't think he could have devoured all that so easily"

It was the worst having such an enemy but nothing essentially changed.

"This became quite terrible"

"Really"

Looking at each other with gloom faces, they let out a sigh.

That's when the noticed the sound of small steps approaching this way.

Recognizing his blunder hearing those steps, Kazuma smacked his lips a little.

"I forgot, Ren came with Oyaji too. If we would have attacked at the same time, maybe we could have killed it."

"…now that you mention it, that's right"

Ayano who didn't notice it before either agreed but it was too late.

Even if they would have been called or signaled using wind they could have synchronized.

Doing so the power would have doubled in one go. The possibility of getting hurt, would have lowered too.

"Shit, it means I lost my cool"

"That may be so but there's nothing to do about it now. Let's think about what we're going to next. — Ren, how was the trip?"

"Nee-sama, are you safe—"

Ayano smiled at her *younger brother* rushing over. Matching her, Ren faintly opened his mouth but immediately clamped it shut hard.

This is not the time to laugh — he thought that in the present progressive form.

"Ren—?"

"Please come"

Ren shortly answered at that questioning gaze.

"Fuan's—Xiaolei-san is…"

"Aah"

Ayano revealed a heartless cough. It seems she forgot about her just until now.

And if Ayano was heartless Kazuma should be called cruel or atrocious. Without being surprised, he said unconcerned.

"What, is she still alive?"

"…Yes. Still"

"…"

The meaning of those words was clear.

Ayano was unable to utter a word.

"…where is she?"

"This way. —Nii-sama, can you move?"

At his brother's question, Kazuma put strength in various places on his body as if trying to confirm his physical condition and nodded.

"Ayano, lend me your shoulder"

"—Eeh?"

Maybe because she didn't like Kazuma's firm request or maybe she had another reason, in any case she frowned.

But she couldn't deny he got hurt because of her.

When finally arriving, Xiaolei was already on death's door. The hemorrhage was lethal no matter how you looked at it, her face deathly pale, and although she was still faintly breathing, she was already dead.

"How cruel…"

In the middle of that silence, discerning nothing can be done, only Ren wasn't able to accept it, looking up at his father.

"To- Tou-sama, can't we save her?"

"It's impossible"

Ruthlessly, Genma replied immediately.

"This can't be fixed by a human hand. All we can do is to instantly ease her suffering."

"No way…Nii-sama, don't you have more Elixir?"

Once, during the fight with Fuuga-Shu, using that, Kazuma saved Ayano from the verge of death.

It's true that if he had something like that, he could save Xiaolei but—

"Idiot. I won't get my hands on that again as long as I live"

Like parent like child, the heartlessness in Kazuma's reply wouldn't lose to his father's.

"No way…"

Ren was lost in grief.

In the meantime, Kazuma separated from Ayano, stood by himself, and walked until he was in front of Xiaolei, next to his brother.

And then, looking down on the almost-dead girl, he said what mattered most to her.

"For now, the Chijutsushi is dead. The other one ran but I will definitely kill him. Their boss too. So go on with peace of mind."

That moment Xiaolei's expression changed. Those pupils that blankly looked at the sky regained their focus perceiving Kazuma.

"…"

Her lips moved often, letting out feeble breaths. It seems she wanted to say something but that soundless murmur didn't reach anyone's ears.

Understanding that, Xiaolei closed her lips and this time she slowly raised her left arm.

— that's right, the arm still holding Kokusen.

Mustering the last of her strength, she pushed out the spear that must, in her condition be heavy enough to break her arm.

And then, she held it out to Kazuma.

There were no words. Not because she already lost her strength but because her tied up lips had no more to say.

But even so, Xiaolei's intention was clear. That's how she said *"Use this"*.

Unintentionally Ayano looked at Kazuma.

Since before, this man, in spite of having the chance of acquiring the spear, he threw it away only saying *"I don't need it"*.

That wasn't for show or because he considered the girl's feelings but because he thought so from the bottom of his heart — but even so, he's not going to step on the girl's last request is he—

"—Humph"

Snorting like he was displeased, Kazuma took Kokusen.

Ayano was secretly relieved but next, he grasped it tightly and raised it overhead even higher—and in one breath he sharply swung it downward.

"EEh?"

In front of Ayano, looking at this dumbfounded, Kokusen's spearhead pierced through Xiaolei's open wound making it even bigger.

The girl's body convoluted.

"How many times do I have to say this? I don't need something like that"

"Wha—Kazuma!?"

Confused by the unexpected violence, Ayano was about to draw near him. But, slightly quicker, Genma restrained her.

"Ojii-sama!?"

"Wait"

Without reproach, with a calm expression, plainly, Genma told her so.

"Wait? We don't have time to—"

"At any rate that won't change the outcome. Besides, if he wanted to finish her off, we wouldn't have aimed for such a wound."

"Aah"

She noticed after he said it. Kazuma's blow went through the one Chris made. And it wasn't a vital point.

But then, from the time it was pierced this became a fatal wound regardless of vital points.

That's why Xiaolei was on the verge on dying — massive blood loss, the vital organs still intact.

If Kazuma wanted to *ease her suffering* as Genma put it, it would have meant instant death, aiming for her heart.

Since he didn't do so, he must have had another purpose.

"But, what on earth did he…"

In front of Ayano starring at him hard, Kazuma clasped Kokusen's handle with both his hands. And then, he slowly looked at the sky.

"—Eeh?"

Those eyelids that closed for a second opened immediately.

Noticing his pupils changed to a deep blue, Ayano revealed a voice of bewilderment.

"Hey, what are you— Agh!"

The radiation of explosive power obstructed her question. Faced with that pressure she endured in the middle of combat, she reflexively backed off.

The surrounding atmosphere — the wind was dyed blue in one breath. That blue wind coiling gently in swirls wrapped the entire park even permeating through the soil and atmosphere, purifying miasma without leaving a trace.

"Th- this—"

"Hou, is this Kazuma's wind?"

Genma, the only one keeping calm amount the bystanders, let out a murmur of admiration.

"Aah, now that you mention it, Ojii-sama and Otou-sama didn't see Kazuma's wind of purification— that's not the problem, now!"

Among the mayhem, before making sense of it, she was embraced by a feeling of calm. But it scattered in a moment, unable to form and at that moment—

…She heard that song again

A light soprano and a grave bass. Although bipolar, those singing voices wove miraculously with exquisite harmony, unmistakably the Spirits of Wind and Wind's sacred treasure, Kokusen.

The revival of yesterday's wonderful sound— no, it was much more magnificent than that.

"B-but…why?"

What meaning does it have?

Last time, when Kokusen didn't respond to Xiaolei, Kazuma used his Contractor power to return it into the girl's hand.

But right now, doing so is meaningless and the girl can't be cured.

"What on earth…eeh!?"

Ayano reflexively blinked. But even so the scene doesn't change. It doesn't stop.

Kokusen stuck in Xiaolei's stomach gradually sunk in. But, there's only earth underneath her and Kazuma doesn't seem to have the strength to do so.

Then, where does it disappear to?

"Ayano, that girl, she's not Kokusen's formal inheritor?", asked Genma suddenly.

"Eeh? Yes, that's right"

"Then, Kazuma is doing it right now. And perhaps he is using the power of the stored Sacred Treasure to compensate for her life force."

"Eeeeh!? Can he do something like that!?"

Seirei Jutsu have no healing jutsu. Humans can borrow the Spirits' strength but that's only the manifestation of the four elements, they are unable to interfere with organic matter, like human bodies.

The only exception is the Chijutsushi's resilience but that's related more with the constitution of the body than with Jutsu and cannot heal others.

"This is not healing. In the end it's a temporary substitution. Something like a pump to her heart to make the blood flowing until the operation. Think of it like that. The temporary replenishment of her lost vitality with the Sacred Treasure's power, stalling before medical treatment is applied. I think it must be something like that?"

"Hmmm"

"Of course, that's just conjecture. Even if it's Kazuma, I don't have positive proof. But, even if he fails there's nothing to lose."

Surely, at this rate Xiaolei will die. That part doesn't change. But—

"But in the worst case, there's also the the probability of losing Kokusen together with Xiaolei, no?"

"Hmmm, a huge probability"

"Waah", murmured Ayano amazed by Genma's very impersonal tone.

She thought this kind of disposition, totally apathetic towards everything that doesn't have value for him was just like Kazuma. Or rather, the spitting image of Kazuma.

"Ren said this too but this parent and child are quite alike in spite of their great differences"

While thinking inconsequential things, the Inheritance Ceremony's abridged version finished.

Kokusen was completely stored inside Xiaolei and at the same time, seeming to have used all his strength, Kazuma fell on his knees.

"Kazuma!?"

Ayano rushed over flustered and propped that body about to collapse. She shuddered when she touched him.

His body temperature was terribly low. His complexion was pale, looking like he could die any minute.

On the other hand, Xiaolei's condition stabilized. She was unconscious but breathing heavily. That rhythm was constant, without disturbance.

She seemed to have recovered a bit of color.

"…Oyaji"

"What?"

Genma replied to his son hoarse in an extremely calm tone.

"Do you have a car?"

"Yes, it's waiting at the entrance."

"Then, use it already. It won't hold very long"

"I understand"

Nodding, Genma carefully held Xiaolei in his arms and started walking towards the car. Without sparing a second glance for those remained.

"Wha- wait, Ojii-sama, what about Kazuma?"

"Kazuma can't possibly consent to me carrying him. On the other hand, there's not enough time for him to make it to the car supported by you. If we do so we won't be able to save this girl"

"But, Kazuma's in such a state—"

"Except his injury that's just battle fatigue. If he rests, there should be no problem. Besides, the said person doesn't seem to be complaining."

Now that you mention it, looking at Kazuma, his head placed on her shoulder, although in pain he looked happy for some reason.

He didn't have the energy to speak but it was clear he wasn't objecting to Genma's words.

"That's how it is. —Ren, you're coming too. I need an attendant."

"Aah, yes"

He hesitated for a second looking at Kazuma and Ayano but just like Genma said, it was a race against time.

Ren made a short bow and started running after his father.

Dozens of seconds after being left behind, Ayano finally started to deal with it.

"Wha…what to do?"

Inside her arm there was Kazuma's body, appearing totally exhausted.

From an outsider's point of view, they looked like a pair of lovers exchanging a passionate embrace.

How to say this—it was very awkward in this situation.

She must calm herself no matter what, she shouldn't move, they are excessively close.

She can't compose herself.

"Kazuma— are you still alive?"

Unable to bear the silence, feeling uneasy towards the unmoving Kazuma she asked so but instead of words his survival was conveyed through action.

"…"

Ayano wrinkled her brow, tearing off the hand gently brushing her buttocks.

"Geez, why are you so skillful at irritating other people's sensitivity?"

"When you don't see me like that…"

She understood that behavior was without relations to lewdness.

At the very least, so far, Ayano never perceived the appearance of passion in Kazuma's eyes when looking at her.

All his sexual harassment presence was designed to feign frivolity or to piss her off.

This time it was probably the latter, thinking of angering her enough to go back.

And then hide himself like a wounded beast, devoting himself intently to the recovery of his stamina—

Alone.

"Good grief"

While murmuring so, amazed, Ayano held Kazuma's head with both her hands and slowly and carefully, she placed it on top of her tights.

What is commonly known as sleeping with one's head in another's lap.

Unable to look straight at Kazuma's face, looking up at her surprised, Ayano blushed and turned the other way.

And then, without moving from that posture,

"…I should tell you just in case, I will get angry if you touch me somewhere weird again. Enough to give you the finishing blow"

Despite hiding her embarrassment underneath a threat, she was wiping the blood from his forehead in a gentle manner.

If this would have happened just after they met, she might have done just what Kazuma intended her to.

Throwing his body while screaming *"Diee! "*, she would have returned home by herself. Maybe she would have called an ambulance.

But right now…

"You can leave, you know?"

This time faced with Kazuma speaking frankly, Ayano shook her head without hesitation.

"Until Ojii-sama comes back or sends someone to pick you up, I'll stay. How can I just leave you here? I'm your— partner, aren't I?"

That's why don't be lonely. **I won't let you**.

"…Indeed"

"That's right. Do you have any complaints?"

At that question or reprimand more like it, Kazuma didn't reply.

Ayano too didn't say anything letting that silence, by no means unpleasant, fill the surrounding and soak through their bodies.

And then—

"Ayano"

At the end of that long or perhaps short silence, Kazuma's faint voice but full of strength.

"We must win next time"

Therefore let's fight together— at those words informing his <<partner>> Ayano replied in a tone of absolute confidence.

"Of course"